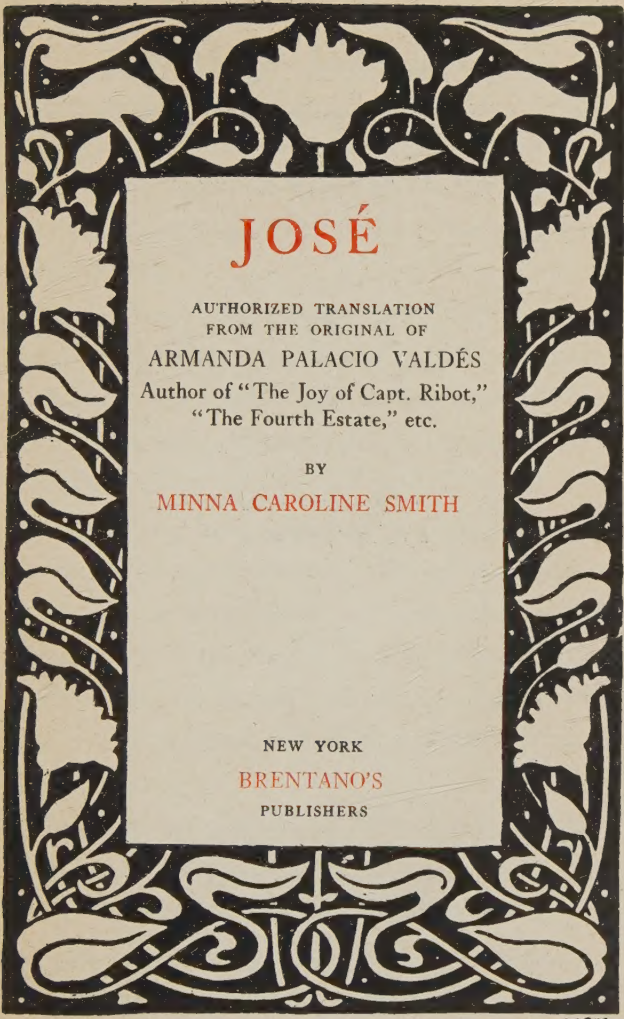


José



JOSÉ

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION
FROM THE ORIGINAL OF
ARMANDA PALACIO VALDÉS
Author of "The Joy of Capt. Ribot,"
"The Fourth Estate," etc.

BY
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Author's Introduction

IF some day you come to the province of Asturias do not go away without taking a peep at Rodillero.

It is the most strange and curious place there, if not the most beautiful. Yet in point of beauty I consider that it can hold its own with any other, although this is not the general opinion. The majority of people smile compassionately when speaking of Rodillero, even as when, in conversation, mention is made of a cripple or hunchback, or any other mortal marked in a grotesque way by the hand of God. This is unjust. I confess that Rodillero is not genteel, but it is sublime, which is more important.

Imagine a road winding down the coast like a high stairway, picturesque and pleasant. One comes upon scattered white houses fronting on it, half hidden by the foliage of trees, and country places from whose orchards clusters of

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golden and rosy apples hang over the road. A crystal brook winds through the middle, spreading cheer and freshness. Before extends the great blue plain of the ocean. Behind are the distant peaks of mountains, which form a dim, rugged barrier round about the arable lands that stretch away low and level. Already nearing the sea, you begin to descend rapidly, following the stream towards a grim black chasm; at the bottom of it is Rodillero. But this chasm is found to be cut in the shape of a sickle, and offers not a few crooks and turns before it opens upon the ocean. On both sides the cottages that make up the village are fastened to the cliff itself, as the high walls that shut it in do not give more than enough space for the stream and a narrow street that borders it. Street and brook go on making S's in such a fashion that sometimes you come up against the mountain in front of you and hear the sound of the sea behind it, not knowing where to go to see it; that same brook will tell you. Escape from this spot; pass down in front of yet another pile

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of houses, ranged one below another like a flight of steps; again you come upon the cliff obstructing your way. The sounds of the sea become stronger, the street begins to widen; here you stumble on a boat that has been careened; farther on, upon several seine-nets stretched on the ground; you perceive the sickening odor of the spoiled remains of fish. The stream flows dirtier and more slowly, and there are boats floating upon it. At last, on turning round a cliff, you find yourself facing the sea. The sea penetrates, suddenly, the dark, widening current of the stream. The beach which is discovered below is not of sand, but of pebbles. There is no wharf, nor any construction whatever, for the protection of the boats. When the mariners return from fishing, they are obliged to haul their boats up to get them into safety.

Rodillero is a village of fishermen. The houses, in general, are small and poor, and have no outlook except in front. At the back they are sagging away from the cliff to which

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they are attached. There are some less ill-looking ones that belong to the few persons of importance who live in the place, most of them enriched by the trade in canned fish. They alone have a garden worked out of the mountain side, with entrance from their second story. There are, further, three or four ancestral mansions, uninhabited, half ruined. I knew that the hidalgos who had lived in them had long ago fled from the sombre and monotonous existence of that singular village. When you visit it, you will see the reason. To live in the depths of that dismal chasm, where the noises of the sea and of the wind are like moans in a winding stairway, must be very melancholy.

In Rodillero, however, nobody is bored; there is no time for that. The rude, incessant struggle with the ocean, that that handful of beings is obliged to maintain for their food, absorbs their attention in such a manner that they do not miss the enjoyments that great cities afford. The men go out upon the sea at midnight or in the morning, according to their station, and

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return in the evening. The women occupy themselves in carrying fish to neighboring villages or in preparing it in the fish-houses; in knotting and mending the nets, in making sails, and with the rest of their domestic duties.

I observed an extraordinary difference in character and mental faculties between the two sexes. The men are usually grave, taciturn, long-suffering, of limited understanding and noble heart. In the schools I noticed that the boys were quick-witted and had bright minds, but as they grew older this was quenched, little by little, without one's being able to attribute it to any other cause than the exclusively material life that they lead, almost as soon as they begin to earn their own bread. From the sea to the tavern, from the tavern to the house, and from the house again to the sea; and thus from one day to another until they die or are disabled. There is, nevertheless, in the depths of the soul, a spark of spiritual life that is never quenched, for by it religion is held fast. The inhabitants of Rodillero are profoundly

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religious; the constant peril they live in moves them to fix their thoughts and hope on God. The fisherman every day casts himself on the sea which knows him not. Every day he goes out to lose himself in the infinite azure of water and air without knowing if he will return. And sometimes, indeed, he does not return. Never do many years pass that Rodillero does not pay her tribute of flesh to the ocean. On some occasions the tribute is terrible. In the winter of 1852 eighty men perished, representing one-third part of the working population. Little by little this goes on telling upon the spirit of the men, separating them from materialistic interests; making them generous, serene, tender in the family. Misers, schemers and swindlers do not abound among men of the sea, as among those in the country.

The woman is very different. She has the qualities that her husband lacks, but also the defects. She is intelligent, of a genius active and enterprising, astute and capable, which tends almost always in the direction of family

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interests. In business she is apt to be greedy, loquacious and quarrelsome. So much for her moral character. For that which has to do with the corporeal, there is nothing to do but give up and confess that there are none in Asturias, nor perchance in Spain, who can bear comparison with these. Tall, well-formed, of firm and rosy flesh ; black, abundant tresses ; eyes black also, large and full, that gaze with severity like those of the Greek goddesses ; the nose straight and somewhat aquiline, joined to the forehead by a delicate line, ending in nostrils slightly dilated and of an extraordinary mobility, indicating clearly their impetuous and passionate nature ; the mouth fresh, of a clear red that contrasts excellently with the whiteness of the teeth. They walk with dignity like the Roman women, speaking rapidly and in musical accents that make them remembered wherever one may go. They smile little, and this with a certain olympic disdain. I do not believe that in any other corner of Spain could be found so exquisite a nosegay of women.

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In this corner, as in all the rest of the earth, are played comedies and dramas, not so complex as those in cities, because more simple in manners, but perhaps no less interesting. One of these offered itself to me to relate: it is the simple story of a poor seaman. Listen to it, you who love humble truth, for I dedicate it to you.

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I

It was two o'clock in the afternoon. The sun glittered, burning, sparkling, upon the sea. The breeze scarcely had force to swell the sails of the fishing boats that moved by its chance upon the waters of ocean.

The jutting summits along the coast and the mountains back in the country showed themselves in the distance, enveloped in the finest azure veiling.

The hamlets along the shore looked like white points at the heads of the bays. Silence reigned, the solemn silence of the sea at rest. The greater part of the fishermen slept or dozed in varied and fantastic attitudes, some face downwards upon the gunwale, some reclining, others stretched out on their backs in the bottom of the boats. All kept in their right hands the lines of their tackle that cut the water behind the boats in parallel lines. This

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habit was not given up even in slumber the most profound.

Thirty or forty craft were sailing within sight one of another, forming a sort of little squadron, and slipping with so little haste over the smooth and lucent surface of the water, that sometimes they seemed immovable. The canvas rustling continually against the masts made a little low noise that invited sleep. The heat was moist and stifling, as seldom happens on the sea.

The master of one of the boats let go of the tiller for an instant, drew out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat from his brow; then he turned to grasp the helm again, and casting a scrutinizing glance at the horizon, fixed his attention upon a boat that had taken itself far enough off; soon he returned to his careless position, gazing with heedless eyes at his sleeping companions. He was young, ruddy, with blue eyes; his features, although lined and bronzed by the weather, were, nevertheless, pleasing; the beard close and abundant; the dress like that of all these seamen, breeches

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and jacket of blue cotton and a white cap; somewhat finer, however, and better made.

One of the fishermen lifted at last his forehead from the gunwale, and rubbing his eyes, muttered gloomily and ill-humoredly:

“The devil take me if we are not going to be becalmed all day! ”

“I don’t believe it,” replied the master, scrutinizing the horizon anew. “Before another hour the wind will freshen from the west; it looks as if it would come from there. Tomas has already tacked to go and meet it.”

“Where is Tomas going ? ” asked the seaman, looking at the sea, screening his eyes with his hands.

“I can’t see him now.”

“Is he fishing any ? ”

“It doesn’t look like it to me, but he is going to fish, and we’re all going to fish ! To-day we shall not be without a bonito in the house.”

“We shall see if we are!” grumbled the man, throwing himself face downward to sleep again.

The master was once more the only man

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awake in the vessel. Tired of looking at the face of the sea and at the boats, he cast his eyes upon an old mariner who was sleeping, face upwards, underneath the thwarts, with such an expression of ferocity on his countenance that it was enough to inspire fear. But the master, instead of showing any, smiled with pleasure.

“*Oye*, Bernardo ! ” he said, touching on the shoulder the man with whom he had just been talking, “ look what an ugly face the corsair puts on to sleep in ! ” The man lifted his head again and smiled, but with a sneering expression.

“ Hold on a bit, José. We are going to have some fun. Give me that stone.”

The master, understanding what was to follow, picked up a large stone that served for ballast in the stern, and carried it in silence to his companion. Then the corsair’s line was drawn slowly and carefully out of the water, and when he had taken off the hook, he fastened the stone securely to it, and let it fall very gently into the water. Then he hastily threw himself down again in the attitude of slumber.

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“ Oh, Our Lady ! ” cried the startled fisherman, on feeling the vigorous pull at his line. The celerity with which he jumped up made him strike his head against the thwart, but he did not complain.

All of the party woke up and leaned to the port side, where the corsair began to pull proudly on his line. Bernardo also lifted his head, exclaiming ill-humoredly:

“ The corsair is fishing already ! There can't be even one fish in the sea that that rascal does n't get a bite ! ”

As he said this he winked at a fisherman who in his turn gave a nudge to another, and he to another, so that in an instant all were in the joke.

“ Is it a big one, corsair ? ” Bernardo spoke again.

Big ? Come here and draw in ! You will see how he pulls.”

The fisherman took hold of the line that the other offered him, and making frightful faces at his companions, exclaimed in a solemn tone:

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“The Lord strike me dead if it doesn’t weigh thirty pounds ! It’s the best beast of the season ! ”

Meanwhile, for some time the corsair, tremulous, smiling, bursting with pride, pulled vigorously, but gently, on his line, taking care to pay it out from time to time, so as not to lose his prize. The faces of the fishermen, who had hard work to restrain their laughter, were bent over the water.

“What lodestone of a thousand devils can this beggar have about him, that he can catch fish even when he is asleep ! ” exclaimed Bernardo with grimaces more and more grotesque.

The corsair saw that the bonito, contrary to its custom, pulled constantly downwards towards the bottom; but he took no notice of that and went on taking in the line until he could clearly see the stone through the water.

Then Troy fell ! The fishermen burst all together into peals of laughter, and they needed to badly; they broke out with shrieks of delight, thumping their legs with their fists, and doub-

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ling up on the thwarts, powerless to stop their torrents of horse-laughter.

“In with it, corsair ! It’s already almost up ! ”

“It’s not a bonito, but it is a fish much esteemed for its delicacy and flavor.”

“Especially with oil and vinegar, and a little bit of pepper.”

“I bet that it will not weigh thirty pounds, as I said.”

The corsair, black and frowning, and in the worst of tempers, let the stone drop overboard, untied it and once more drew up his line from the water; then he cast a terrible glance at his companions and murmured:

“Pigs ! If ye had seen the misery I have, ye would have no appetite for jokes ! ”

And he stretched himself out anew, growling ugly oaths. The laughter of his companions was not quieted by this; it continued lively for a good while, reanimated whenever it was on the point of dying out by some facetious comment. At last, however, it calmed down and

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was transformed into cheerful chat, and this, in the long run, into drowsiness and sleep.

The breeze began to freshen. The noise of the canvas on the mast took the place of the murmur of the water on the keel.

The master, his head held high, and not losing sight of his boats, breathed with satisfaction this wind, forerunner of good fishing. He cast a glance at the tackle, to make sure that it was not going to get entangled, luffed a little to take advantage of the wind, trimmed the sheet all that he could, and let her go. The craft responded to this handling, leaning to one side to take flight. The lynx eyes of the helmsman saw that one of the boats had just moored.

“We are already over the bonito,” he said in a loud voice, but nobody wakened.

At the end of a moment the man nearest the prow exclaimed forcibly:

“Oh, by Our Lady ! ”

The master shortened sail to stop the boat. The fisherman hesitated before hauling up, struck by remembrance of the joke of a while

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ago; and giving a suspicious look at his companions, asked:

“Is this a stone too?”

“Haul, beast!” growled José, fearing that the fish would get away.

The bonito had already dragged away almost all of the line. The fisherman began to pull in earnest. After hauling in a few fathoms of line he payed out again, for the fish kept up enough action; but it was not difficult to conquer it. It was played, drawn, let go and drawn again. In this way, hauling and letting go, a dark bulk was soon beheld below the bottom of the boat, struggling furiously and scattering silvery drops about; and the nearer he approached the surface of the water, the more furious were his efforts to turn and escape. Sometimes when the fisherman jerked the line he seemed to come up towards him, reproving in such fashion the man whom he deemed free from his own destiny; at other times, used up and lifeless, he would, docile, let himself be drawn towards his death. When he was hauled out of his native

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element and put on board, his leaping and flapping sprinkled the whole crew with water. Afterwards when the hook was taken from his mouth, he remained motionless for an instant, as if he were feigning death; all at once he began to beat about under the thwarts with so much rush and fury that he was within little of jumping into the water once more. But already nobody took any notice of him; two other bonitos had been caught almost at the same time and the fishermen were occupied in getting them in.

The fish were abundant. In two or three hours of work they took on board one hundred and two bonitos.

“How many?” was asked from a boat that passed near by.

“One hundred and two; and you?”

“Sixty.”

“Didn’t I tell ye so!” exclaimed Bernardo, turning to his companions. “You’ll see they won’t get more than eighty to take home. It’s when a man wants to get married that his claws are sharpened enough to scare you!”

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All the faces turned smiling towards the helmsman, whose lips also drew into a smile that made more gracious the expression of his face.

“When are you going to be married, José?” asked one of the fishermen.

“Tomas and Manuel are tacking for shore already,” he said, without answering him. “Ease those halliards, Ramon. We are going to put about.”

After this had been done Bernardo said:

“You ask when José is going to get married. But that’s plain enough. As soon as the boat is launched.”

“When will the sails be on?”

“Very soon. The caulker told me that within fifteen days he would be ready to pass her over,” replied Bernardo.

“We shall have bacon and ham that day; eh, José!”

“And the best Rueda wine,” said another.

“And Havana cigars,” added another.

“I will forgive everything,” said Bernardo,

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“provided that on the day of the wedding you take us to see the comedy at Sarrio.”

“That is impossible. You do not reflect that that night José will not have been able to take a nap in the afternoon.”

“All right. Well, then let him give us the cash to go and let him stop at home.”

The master heard all this without saying a word, and with the same kindly smile on his lips.

“What better comedy,” exclaimed one, “than to slumber in the arms of the daughter of the schoolmaster’s wife.”

“Bah !Bah !Take care what you say!” cried José between smiles and vexation.

His companions applauded the jest as if it were the most delicate, then followed jokes and puns, while the wind, which had begun to fall, pushed them gently along towards the land

II

TWILIGHT had begun when the boats entered the bay of Rodillero. A crowd made up of almost all the women and children were waiting on the shore, talking at the tops of their voices, laughing, quarreling. The old men remained somewhat in the background, seated tranquilly upon some boats that were reposing upturned on the pebbly beach, in the hope of being repaired. The important people, or the better dressed, watched the arrival of the smacks from stone benches that stood in front of the houses nearest the shore.

Long before they landed it was already known to the people on the shore, by the experience of all their lives, that they were bringing in a lot of bonito. And, as is usual in such cases, this knowledge was reflected on their faces in the shape of smiles.

The women got the big baskets ready to re-

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ceive the fish, and stood with arms akimbo in a sort of voluptuous satisfaction. The children climbed up the nearest cliffs, in order to find out quickly what was contained in the bottom of the boats. These arrived slowly, the fishermen grave and silent, dipping their oars lazily into the water. One after another the craft grounded on the pebbles of the beach; the fishermen sprang from them, with a great leap and without getting splashed; some of them remained on board to unload the fish, which was flung up on the shore, piece after piece. The women picked them up, and with incredible speed cut off the heads, cleaned out the insides, and heaped them into the baskets, then tucking up their skirts, went a few steps into the water to wash them. In a short time a good part of the water and of the ground next it was the color of bonito blood.

Now, jumping on shore, the captains of the boats formed into a group and estimated the value of the catch. The owners of the fish-houses, and the old wives who sold fresh fish,

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waited distrustfully at a short distance the result of the colloquy.

One woman, dressed somewhat better than the others, old and with a withered face, sharp nose, and black, sunken eyes, came up to José when he moved away from the group, and asked anxiously:

“How much ? ”

“A real and a half.”

“A real and a half ! ” she exclaimed in angry tone; “and when do you think of lowering it ? Do you suppose we are going to pay the same when there is a great deal as when there is but little ? ”

“Don’t blame me for it, Señá Isabel,” replied José, embarrassed. “I never opened my mouth. They settled it among themselves.”

“But you ought to have explained to them,” replied the old woman in the same irritated tone, “that it is not just; that we shall be miserably ruined; and indeed, we can’t go on like this.”

“Come, señora, don’t worry ! I have fixed

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it so that to-morrow it may go down. Besides, as you already know —”

“What ? ”

“That the two owners of that boat and of mine can pay what we like.”

“I did not say it to you for that,” declared the old woman, softening suddenly, “but you’d better find fault with whoever is going to lose money for us; if it keeps on this way they will manage so that we will not get back from the Maragato men the worth of our barrels. Look, there is Elisa weighing ! See there, you’ll get more out of chatting with her than with me.”

José smiled, said adios, and moved away a few steps.

“Hark, José,” called Señá Isabel, with a wheedling smile. “How does this leave me, after all ? ”

“Just as you like. I have already said so.”

“No, no; it is for you to decide.”

“Does ten cuartos seem too much ? ” he asked timidly.

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"Enough," responded the old woman, without letting go the coaxing smile. "Come, not to waste questions, it will be a real; don't you think so?"

José shrugged his shoulders in sign of resignation, and went on his way to one of the fish-houses, which, with an imposing number of *escabeche* factories, were along the shore.

At the door was a beautiful girl, tall, fresh, rosy like most of her neighbors, although with features finer and more regular than was usual among them. She was dressed in the fashion of the rest, but with more neatness and care. The kerchief knotted about her shoulders was not of cotton, but of wool; her shoes were of fine calf-skin, her stockings white and spotless. Her arms were bare, and certainly they were the most perfect and graceful of their kind. She was rapt in attention to the operation of weighing the bonito, which was being done in her presence by three or four women, aided by a seaman. From time to time she herself took part, holding out the fish in her hands.

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When she heard José's footsteps she lifted her head, and her great black eyes smiled tenderly.

"Hola, José! Have you unloaded already?"

"The boats won't lack unloading. Have they brought all your fish?"

"Yes, it is already here. Tell me," she came up to José, "at how much did you put it?"

"At a real and a half; but for your mother I made it one real."

The face of Elisa flushed quickly. "She begged it of you?"

"No."

"Yes, yes; don't deny it to me! I know her well."

"Come, don't take it seriously. I offered it to her at that price because I understood that unless I did she could not make anything."

"Yes, make, José, make!" said the girl sadly. "She always wishes to make more. Money is everything to her."

"Bah, it's not going to ruin me!"

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“Poor José!” she exclaimed after a moment, putting one hand caressingly upon his shoulder, “How good he is! Fortunately, the troubles that mortify me will soon be over. When do you think the boat will be launched?”

“We will see if we can be ready by St. John’s Day.”

“Then why not speak to my mother? It is time that some sign be made. It will be best if it is going to annoy her.”

“Does it seem to you as if I ought to speak to her?”

“It is clear you ought. Time is passing, and she needs to be given time to understand.”

“But the talk that will follow! In that way we might delay the boat, even if I can get up the courage,” he answered, a little embarrassed.

“He who does not get up his courage, José, never crosses the sea,” replied the girl smiling.

“Must I speak to your step-father, too?”

“It’s all the same. By all means do everything she could wish for.”

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“Good-bye for the present, then.

“Good-bye. Do try to hurry it up so that we will not be left in uncertainty.”

José made his way again to the shore where the mariners had begun pulling the boats up on dry land with no little toil and effort. Twilight was done and night was beginning. The women and children helped their husbands and fathers in this fatiguing task, as they did every day. The measured voices of those who pushed all together could be heard, mingling and timing their strength; and among the shadows that began to thicken could be seen the silhouettes forming the crowd grouped round about the boats of the fishing fleet; these they jerked up over the beach, crunching the pebbles. When they had drawn them far enough from the water for safety, they gathered up their fishing implements, that were scattered along the shore, and casting one last look at the dark immovable ocean, they quitted the place and drifted slowly up into the town.

José also directed his steps thither, after he

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had given his orders for the following day. He went rapidly up the single street, which was bright enough at the time because of the great number of taverns that opened on it ; from all of them came a tremendous noise of voices and oaths.

Paying no attention to the friends who called to him, inviting him to drink, he went on until he came almost to the outskirts of the village, and entered a shop whose lights broke cheerfully upon the darkness of the street. In that little store, low and narrow as the cabin of a ship, everything was sold — codfish, hats, candles, comic papers and catechisms. The preferred places, however, were given to fishing materials and other maritime implements. There were three or four great rolls of cable lying on the floor that served as stools ; strings of hooks hanging from an oar that reached from one wall to the other ; and some half-emptied cans of pitch, dispensing a penetrating odor through the apartment, sickening to those who were not accustomed to endure it. But the

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nostrils of the circle of friends who frequented the shop were not offended ; perhaps they did not notice the presence of such perfumed vessels.

Seated behind the pine table that served as counter was Seña Isabel. Her husband, Don Claudio, master of the primary school of Rodilero (and, indeed, there was no other), was standing at one side, gravely cutting into pieces a bar of soap. The long coat that he wore, — adorned on this occasion by a pair of percaline protectors fastened to his arms with strings, — the rare erudition and the florid diction in which he gloried were not sufficient to turn him from this homely occupation. Ten years ago he had married the widow of the defunct Vega, shop-keeper and manufacturer of *esca-beche* ; and during all this time he had known how to divide nobly, and without injury to either, the high tasks of a schoolmaster with those less glorious of commerce, granting equal attention, so to speak, to Minerva and to Mercury.

He was fifty years of age, more or less, of

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a jaundiced complexion, generous nose, scanty locks, and projecting eyes with an unchanging expression of startled surprise, as if he were ever in the presence of some tragic scene visible only to himself. He was of peaceable and benign demeanor, except when he was in school, where he tormented the children pitilessly, not by inclination of his temperament, but by virtue of doctrines rooted in the depth of his soul. To Don Claudio discipline, the rod, pulling ears and dealing blows formed integral parts of the system of science, the same as letters and numbers. All were comprehended under the general name of correction.

Don Claudio always pronounced this word with reverence. He elevated a slap to the heights of metaphysics; he thought that correction was not an evil, but rather, one of the most delectable and agreeable gifts that the providence of God has bestowed upon mankind. In this notion, he who punished should be considered as a guardian angel, a being like one who staunches a wound. He found means

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to encompass his punishments with ceremony, to the end of obtaining amendment and making an example; none were inflicted on impulse and hastily. First, he entered into the fault committed, then he weighed it in the scales of justice, condemned the offender, and wrote down his sentence on a paper. The victim then had to go and stand in a corner of the schoolroom with other galley slaves, and there await with salutary spasms of terror the fatal hour.

At the close of the lessons Don Claudio ran over the bulletin of the chastised, and immediately began in the order of their seniority to execute those corporal punishments in the presence of the whole school. Once finished with this task, he used to give the flogged and weeping youngsters a few paternal pats on the face, saying affectionately :

“Come, my children, run home, run home ! Some day you will thank me for these whippings that I have given you.”

He was well received in the place, accepted

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everywhere with the benevolence not free from disdain with which he looked upon the inoffensive creatures of this world. The neighbors all knew that Don Claudio lived in shackles at home, that his wife kept him under her thumb, not only because his humble and cowardly temperament lent itself to that, but also because in the conjugal partnership he was the poor one and his wife the rich. The riches of the Señá Isabel, however, were entirely temporary, because they came from the defunct Vega. Everything would fall to Elisa in time, but she managed the property and would manage it for a good while yet, as Elisa was only twelve years old at the death of her father. Don Claudio considered that he had made a good match in wedding the widow; such, at least, was the unanimous opinion of the village. For that matter, he did not pity himself for his domestic annoyances; rather he used to say in sarcastic tones to his comrades in the place:

“You would not care for a rich wife? Well, I have already got her!”

III

"FINE catch to-day, eh, José?"

"At the last moment! I did not think we were going to bring home twenty pounds."

"How much does the fish weigh?"

"I don't know. Go to Señá Isabel."

She, who knew perfectly well, looked up at Elisa and asked :

"How much, Elisa?"

"One thousand, one hundred and forty."

"Then at a real and a half you ought to make to-day very nearly twenty duros," said the first speaker, who was the Rodillero justice of the peace, in person.

On hearing these words, Elisa's color flamed again. José hung his head, somewhat embarrassed, mumbling,

"Not so much; not so much."

The Señá Isabel went on sewing impassively.

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“How not so much?” burst forth Don Claudio, repeating his syllables energetically, according to his custom; “It seems to me that the señor judge has left it a little short. Nothing easier than to estimate exactly what belongs to you; it is the simplest operation in elementary arithmetic. Wait a bit!” He went over to a shelf and took down paper and a quill.

His wife flung him a cold, sharp glance, which would have annihilated him if it had not hit him when his back was turned. He drew from his pocket an ink-horn, and unscrewed it with difficulty.

“Let’s see. Problem. One thousand, one hundred and forty pounds of bonito at a real and a half per pound. How many reals would that be? We must multiply one thousand, one hundred and forty by one and a half. It is the multiplication of a whole number by a mixed number. We are obliged to reduce the mixed number to a fraction. Once two is two. We will take two halves plus one half. We have the common denominator. We add the num-

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bers. Two and one, three—three halves. We will now multiply the whole number by the fraction. Three times naught is naught; three times four, twelve; carry one—”

“Don’t you wish to leave us in peace, dear?” interrupted the Señá Isabel, with difficulty restraining her anger. “We are tired of your carrying so many fractions and so many mixed numbers for nothing.”

“Wife, do you wish me to count on my fingers? Science—”

“Bah, bah, bah! You are not in school here. Do me the favor to be quiet.”

Don Claudio made a grimace of resignation, screwed the ink-horn cover on again, buried it in the depths of his coat, and set himself again at dividing soap.

After a pause the municipal justice mitigated Don Claudio’s rebuff by making a complete defence of arithmetic; it appeared that none of the sciences were more exact. But Don Claudio, although grateful for the succor, showed contrariness before the affirmations of authority,

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and opened a dispute concerning the origin and dignity of the sciences.

This municipal justice of Rodillero was a captain of infantry, retired now for years enough, living, or vegetating, in his native village on the scanty pension that government paid him tardily and irregularly. A sister older than he kept his house and looked after the place. He was taciturn, captious and sensitive in the highest degree. He enjoyed a reputation for punctilious honor and uprightness. He looked upon his extreme uprightness of character and his unconquerable attachment to his own opinions as defects.

Beside him sat an old-school gentleman, of noble and regular features, with large white mustachios and an imperial that reached half way down his breast; his hair was abundant, dishevelled; his eyes black and ardent, the glance high, and the smile disdainful. His small stooped figure was not a worthy pedestal for that beautiful head. Then the worn and dirty coat that was dropping off, the coarse

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cloth pantaloons, and the pegged shoes, contributed much to impair his dignity. He was called Don Fernando de Meira, and belonged to an ancient and noble family of Rodillero, totally ruined these many years past. The sons of this family had scattered themselves about the world, in search of necessary support. The only one who remained fastened to the old ancestral mansion, like an oyster, was Don Fernando, whose profession of advocate had never served to earn his living, whether for lack of aptitude in his exercise of it, or whether because of the profound contempt felt by this noble scion of the house of Meira for all occupations except hunting or fishing.

He lived in one of the half-ruined apartments of his house, which had been falling to pieces in different parts for no little time. He was companioned by rats that skirmished and battled freely all about the place; by timid lizards that nested in the crannies, and by a multitude of bats that flew about nights with a fearful noise. Nobody knew of his having any

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rents or property to support him, and it passed as an article of faith in the village that the old gentleman many a time saw hunger draw near.

When he was younger he used to go hunting and was accustomed to bring in plenty of provision, for he was the most skillful hunter in that region; when his strength began to fail, he devoted himself entirely to fishing. On days when the sea was beautiful, the Señor de Meira would go out in his boat for calamar and tunny-fish, for perch or smelts, according to the state of the water; in this art he showed himself as well posted as in hunting. The extra fish that he caught went to regale special friends in Rodillero, because Don Fernando would sooner have let himself die of hunger than to sell a single fish caught with his own hand. But these gifts naturally incited others in just exchange, and thanks to them, the caballero was able to supply the most pressing necessities of his kitchen, wood, oil, eggs, etc., and also to have a little extra sometimes; he himself prepared the food that he ate, and with no little

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intelligence, people said. They spoke in high praise of a special *caldareta*, a dish of stewed fish, that Señor de Meira concocted as no cook could. But there arrived a day when the village learned with surprise that the caballero had sold his boat to a merchant in Sarrio; everybody guessed the reason, however much he concealed it, saying that he had got rid of it in order to buy a better one.

After that, instead of going out on the sea, he used to fish with a rod from the shore, waiting patiently for some solitary catch. When none came, the neighbors would observe that no smoke arose from the chimney of the de Meira house.

“Mother, aren’t you going to make up José’s account? It is time for supper,” said Elisa to Señá Isabel.

“Have you a coming appetite?” inquired this one, drawing her lips into a fictitious smile. “Then wait, then wait, my daughter, until you finish what’s in your hands to do.”

From the time that José entered the shop,

JOSÉ

Elisa had not stopped making little private signs for him to speak to her mother, aside, emphatically telling him to do what was right.

The mariner appeared timid and hesitant and declared to his sweetheart, also by signs, that he would wait until the company had dispersed. She replied that they would not go until the moment for supper arrived. José could not make up his mind. At last the girl, tired of the indecision of her betrothed, ventured to present for her mother's consideration that which we have already heard, and suggested that they should go into the room behind the shop, and begin there the conversation that she desired. The reply of the Señal Isabel made these young people sad and thoughtful.

Three or four other mariners had entered the shop since our José, among them Bernardo. The conversation, as usual, turned upon possessions; who had more, and who had less. There was talk of a potentate of the province, who had just acquired certain lands in the region.

JOSÉ

“Is this señor count very rich?” asked a mariner.

Don Fernando extended his hand solemnly and said :

“My cousin, the Count de la Mata has four thousand *fanegas* from his mother in Piona. His father left him little. The estate of the Velascos was never very large, and my uncle wasted it greatly.”

“The two hundred *fanegas* that he has bought in Riofontan,” said the justice, “are the best in the district. They were sold for twenty thousand duros.”

“Don Anacleto must have means. His son wasted a fortune in Madrid, it was said.” Don Claudio pointed out.

“He got a good bargain when he bought these,” said one of the seamen.

“From whom did he buy them?” asked another.

Don Fernando extended his hand anew with equal majesty, saying,

“From my cousin, the Marquis de las Quin-

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tanás. But he was not in need of money. He sold the lands in order to remove his rents to Andalusia."

"Is that señor also your cousin?" said Bernardo, lifting his head and making a comic grimace that caused those present to smile.

Don Fernando cast a wrathful glance upon him.

"Yes, señor, he is my cousin. And what of that?"

"Nothing, nothing," declared Bernardo with a mischievous drawl; "it only seemed to me an excess of high cousining."

"Then you may as well know," exclaimed Don Fernando with exaltation, "that my house is two hundred years more ancient than his. When the Quintanas were nobodies, petty gentry, of small importance in Andalusia, already the señors de Meira had raised their standard in Asturias, had founded their own church, and set up their own gallows on the estates that now belong to Pepe Llanos. A Quintana came to ask the hand of a lady of the house of

JOSÉ

Meira, holding it a high honor. In my family at that time there were plentiful dowries for all the females who married. From my family went dowries to the house of Miranda, to that of Peñalta, to that of Santa Cruz, and to that of Guzman — ”

“Come,” said Bernardo, smiling; “that is what left you so poor.”

Don Fernando’s eyes blazed with anger on hearing these mischievous words.

“Hark you, clown, pig, has any one been begging anything of you? What have you to do with my riches or my poverty? You must understand that you and I were not bred alike, you superlative coward!”

“Don Fernando,” soothed Don Claudio, “anger is ill-advised.”

“Don’t take any notice of him, Don Fernando,” cried the Señá Isabel.

“Peace, peace, peace, señores!” exclaimed the municipal justice, lifting his hands with authority.

Bernardo laughed sulkily, without seeming

JOSÉ

to concern himself at all with the insults that the Señor de Meira had poured forth. These scenes were frequent between them; the merry mariner enjoyed mortifying him and seeing him get angry; afterwards he repented of what he had said, making his peace, until next time. The old gentleman could not hold rancor against anybody. His angers were like the foam on wine.

“Mother, it is time for supper,” said Elisa, availing herself of the silence that followed the quarrel. “José wants to be going.”

The old woman did not reply. Her watchful eye had discovered that for some time Don Fernando had been trying to get a word apart with her husband. At the moment when Elisa returned to her text, she observed that he pulled secretly at Don Claudio’s coat, while walking over to the door, as if to look out at the weather. The schoolmaster followed him.

“Claudio,” said Señal Isabel, before they were able to begin their talk, “bring me that package of pearl buttons that has been begun on.”

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Don Claudio turned on his heel, went over to the shelves, and, standing on tip-toe as high as he could, took the buttons down from the highest shelf. In the instant when he put them into her hands his spouse said to him in low, peremptory accents:

“Go upstairs!”

The master opened wide his great goggle eyes, without comprehending.

“You are to get out of here,” said his wife, plucking at his sleeve energetically.

Don Claudio hastened to obey without asking explanations. He went out by the door that stood open, and went up the house stairs.

“The head of the house of Meira is in need of cash,” said Bernardo, in the ear of a mariner who sat near by. “Did you see how soon seña Isabel smelled that out? If she had but delayed throwing the maestro out!”

The mariner, smiling, glanced at the caballero, who stayed, expecting Don Claudio.

“Señors, will you be pleased to have supper?” said Isabel, rising from her chair.

JOSÉ

The assembly all rose also.

“José, you are going to come up with us, are you not?”

“If you wish it. If to-morrow suits better, we could arrange this —”

“Very well, if it seems better to you.”

Elisa could not refrain from a gesture of annoyance, and she said precipitately :

“Mother, to-morrow is a bad day. You know that already. We have to fasten up a lot of barrels, and then there is mass, which always hinders somewhat.”

“Don’t worry yourself so much, girl, I tell you. We will arrange it to-day,” giving her daughter a cold, keen glance that alarmed her.

The company departed, saying good-night. Isabel then locked the door, took up the lamp and went upstairs, followed by Elisa and José.

The little parlor that she entered was very small, after the fashion of the shop. Thanks to the care of Elisa, it showed a pleasant arrangement and appearance ; the furniture was old, but

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it shone. There was a little mirror in a gilded frame covered with netting to protect it from the flies ; on the table were two large sea-shells, and in the middle a small glass boat crudely made.

These marine decorations served to adorn the parlors of all respectable houses in Rodillero.

On the walls hung some poor prints in black frames, representing the conquest of Mexico ; the preference given to the scenes between Hernando Cortes and Doña Marina ; below the looking-glass were some photographs, also in black frames, wherein figured Isabel and her defunct Vega, soon after having been united in matrimonial bonds. Half a dozen chairs and a sofa with a linen cover, completed the furniture.

When they entered the room Don Claudio, who was looming in the corridor, departed, leaving the coast clear.

Seña Isabel passed into the alcove in search of the worn and ragged blank book in which every day she cast up the accounts of her

JOSÉ

business. Elisa improved the moment by saying quickly to her betrothed, "Don't fail to speak to her."

José made an affirmative sign, although revealing the fear and perturbation that the situation produced in him. The girl had gone when her mother returned into the room.

"Sunday, three hundred and seven pounds," said Isabel, putting the lamp down on the table and opening her account book, "at one real and a quarter; Monday, a thousand and forty at one real; Tuesday, two thousand two hundred, at half a real; Wednesday they did not go out; Thursday, two hundred and thirty-five at two reals; Friday, nothing; to-day, one thousand forty at a real and a half. Isn't that right, José?"

"That's as you say, señora. I have not counted it up."

"Let us make up the account."

The old woman began to multiply; nothing could be heard in the room but the scratching of her pen. José awaited the result of the

JOSÉ

operation, turning over and over the flat cap that he held in one hand.

No interest or anxiety concerning the amount of money he was going to receive occupied his soul at that moment; he was entirely distracted and distressed before the idea of discussing the affair of his marriage; he tried anxiously to find some clever way to enter into the matter when the account should have been made up.

"It is four thousand, seven hundred and three reals and three cuartillos," said the Señá Isabel, lifting her head.

José kept silent in sign of assent. There was a pause.

"There, you can receipt this," said the old woman, lowering her voice and sweetening it a little. "This reduction that was made for me by you, and that by the boats: Sunday they placed it at one real for me; Monday at three cuartillos; Wednesday I had no reduction; Thursday, one real and a half; and to-day one real; isn't it so?"

JOSÉ

“Yes, señora.”

“The account is hard to make up. Don’t you want to let it all go at seven cuartos, and avoid any mistakes? It appears to me that I should lose by it —”

José consented, without seeming to think whether he should gain or lose. The old woman began again to set down figures on the paper, and José began to meditate on what means to take to get out of such a plight.

Isabel finished at last; José was satisfied with his own share and a handful of gold passed from one hand to another, to be divided next day among his companions.

After he had thrust it into a leather purse and put it among the folds of his waist-band, he again began twirling his cap with trembling hands.

The crucial moment of speaking had arrived. José had never been an eloquent orator, but at such a time he felt himself lacking as never before in the qualities that make one. The blood mounted into his throat and choked him; he could scarcely find monosyllables wherewith to

JOSÉ

answer Isabel's questions about the success of the last catch of fish, and what hopes were counted on for the next one. The old woman, after having sucked his blood, was disposed to be amiable with him. But in spite of this, the conversation was finishing without the seaman's having succeeded in giving verbal form to all that he was thinking.

Already Isabel gave signs of putting an end to it, rising from her chair, when Elisa suddenly opened the door and came in, pretending it was to get some scissors that she needed ; then, before she went out again, she got behind her mother's back and made José so many signs and faces, putting him on the right track and demanding the fulfillment of his promises, that the poor seaman, rousing to energy from his weakness, and making a supreme effort, made bold to say :

“Seña Isabel !”

The sound of his voice frightened him and he was extraordinarily surprised also at the old woman's reply :

JOSE

“What are you going to say, dear?”

The glance that accompanied this question made him hang his head. Then followed some instants of suspense and dismay; at the end of them he lifted his head and with a hoarse voice said :

“I think by St. John’s Day I can launch my boat on the water.”

Contrary to what he hoped, the old woman did not interrupt him with a single word. She kept on looking at him fixedly.

“I don’t know if you remember what I said to you in the winter?”

The seña Isabel remained mute.

“I do not wish to incommode you, but as the time will soon be past, and as there is no particular obstacle—and since people are asking each other when it is going to be,—and—and I have the house bespoken—it will be best to have the matter settled before winter draws near.”

Nothing, not a lisp, from the schoolmaster’s wife. José was destined to be even more dis-

JOSÉ

tressed; he looked diligently at the floor, desiring, perhaps, that it would open for him.

The old woman at last deigned to exclaim merrily :

“What a shock you have given me, dear ! I thought you were going to rush some bad news at me ; there is nothing that could give me more pleasure.”

The face of the seaman was quickly illumined.

“How delightful, señora ! I was afraid —”

“Of what ? Do you not know that I desire it as anxiously as you do ? José, you are good, industrious, energetic, with no vices. What more could I desire for my daughter ? I looked upon it favorably from the beginning of your courtship of her, because I was sure that it would make her happy. Up to now I have done all in my power for you two, and God willing, I expect to go on doing so. All day long I go about, racking my brain over it. I do not do anything else but turn it over to see how we can soon arrange this happy marriage. But the young are very impatient, and you are

JOSÉ

likely to spoil everything by your precipitation. Why so much haste? Elisa, like you, is young, and also, thanks be to God! has enough to live on. If by chance in the future you should have many children, you might not be able to say the same. Have a little patience; work until you can be assured that there will be no fear of hunger, and the rest will come."

The face of José clouded again.

"Meanwhile," continued the old woman, "I will take good care of whatever concerns Elisa. I will be watchful that her affection does not decrease and is always as warm and eager as it has been until now. Come, do not let this make you sad; there is no happier time than that which passes while you are engaged. Launch your boat upon the sea soon, so as to get ahead with the bonito catch. When that is done with, if you have done well, we will talk again."

As she said this, she rose. José did the same without taking his eyes from the floor; he was so sad and dejected that he inspired compassion. Isabel gave him several affectionate pats on the

JOSÉ

back, at the same time pushing him towards the door.

“And now we are going to have supper, dear. You must be hungry as well as ourselves. Elisa!” she added, lifting her voice, “light José out; he is going. Well, good-night, *hasta mañana*.”

“Rest well, señora,” replied José in a stifled voice.

Elisa went down the stair and opened the door. They looked at each other sadly.

“Your mother will not have it,” said José.

“I heard everything.”

They remained silent an instant, he outside, ready to go, she within the doorway, the lamp in one hand, with the other leaning on the jamb of the door.

“Last night,” said the girl, “I dreamed of shoes; it is a good sign. That’s why I was so anxious for you to speak to her.”

“I see it is!” he replied, smiling gloomily. “There is no use trusting to dreams.”

After another moment of silence the two

JOSÉ

held out their hands, then pressed them, saying
at the same time,

“Adios, Elisa.”

“Adios, José.”

IV

WHEN the fish grew scarce off the coast of Viscaya, boats came from that shore to fish in the waters of Santander and of Asturias. Their men chose the port that pleased them best and from it went off shore for bonito, during the season, which lasted from about June to September. While earning their living thus, they lived the same life as the fishermen of the district, going out on the sea together and coming back at the same hour. The only difference was that the Viscayans ate and slept in their boats, where they prepared a rude shelter, protecting themselves by an awning daubed with pitch, and hung with a tapestry of old sail; while the natives went peacefully home to their houses. There were no rivalries or disagreements among them. The Viscayans are of kind and peaceable disposition; the Asturians, sharper and livelier in temperament, are also generous and

JOSÉ

hospitable. When they were sailing they helped each other and told each other cheerfully how they were getting on; as soon as they leaped on shore they ran to the taverns and parted amicably after a few goblets of wine. The Viscayans were more sober than the Asturians and seldom got drunk; the Asturians, given, like southerners, to fun and jests, got drunk as a matter of habit.

One of these Viscayans was the father of José. When he had come with the rest to the fishing, one springtime, José's mother was a beautiful young woman, a widow with two little daughters, whom she supported by working in one of the fish-houses. The father of José established relations with her; and promised to marry her; but the beautiful Teresa waited in vain for that. In a few months, before José was born, she learned that he was already married in his own country.

Teresa was of an impetuous and ardent temperament, passionate in her love as in her hates. Angered at having been taken only for low

JOSÉ

motives, she grew foul-mouthed and ugly. She had the rude self-respect of ignorant people, but lacked the poise and good feeling that they know how to maintain. Her quarrels with the neighbors were known to all the world; she made herself formidable by her tongue as well as by her hands. When she was seized by anger, she was transformed into a fury; her great, beautiful black eyes took on a ferocious expression, and all her features were distorted.

The inhabitants of Rodillero, on hearing her vociferating in the street, shook their heads disgustedly, saying: "She is a perfect scandal, that mad woman of Ramon de la Puente" (so her dead husband was called).

The treason of her lover indeed threw her into a sort of madness; she would have found satisfaction in taking a sanguinary vengeance upon him. Her poor daughters had to pay for a while for his transgressions; she could not speak to them without yells that terrified them; the least fault cost them cruel whippings; in short, the day was filled with blows and lamen-

JOSÉ

tations in the obscure grocery where the widow lived.

Under such auspices came our José to the light of day. Teresa was neither able nor did she care to nurse him. She put him into the hands of a countrywoman, who managed by such means to make a few reals, and continued to dedicate herself to the laborious tasks of her business.

When at the end of two years the nurse brought him back, Teresa did not know what to do with him. She turned him over to his sisters, who in their turn, neglected him, to run and play. The poor little boy cried for whole hours, stretched upon the crowded floor of the shop, without receiving the consolation of a caress. When he crept out into the street, it was to feel himself half dead with fear of being trampled under the feet of animals, or crushed by a carriage. If some neighbor took him up, out of kindness, Teresa on coming home, instead of thanking her, would scold her for meddling with her affairs.

JOSÉ

When José had grown a little, her aversion to him showed itself clearly in the ill-treatment that she made him suffer. If she had always been fiery and terrifying to her legitimate daughters, it may be imagined what she was towards this child, son of a man she hated, living witness to her frailty.

José was a martyr from his infancy. Not a day passed that for one cause or another he did not feel the cruelty of the maternal hand; when by chance he did the slightest wrong thing, the poor child fell to trembling, and ran and hid himself in some corner of the village, but it availed him nothing. Teresa, on fire with anger, with a broomstick in her hand, would go through the streets in search of him, pouring forth threats, dishevelled as a fury, followed by children, who always enjoyed assisting at these tragic spectacles, until she found him and dragged him back to the house. If any kind-hearted neighbor ventured from her doorway to reprove her for such cruelty, it was something to hear the insults and outrages that came thick and fast

JOSÉ

from the widow's mouth, turned against the imprudent mentor, who, confounded and abashed, found herself obliged to retire.

For a time José went to school, where he showed himself of a clear and lively intelligence, which was soon quenched in the rough work of the fisheries. When he was a dozen years old he was put into the boats by his mother for boy's service; when he was half grown he took upon himself the duty of aiding in the support of the house.

He found the change agreeable; to spend the day on the sea was preferable to passing it in the schoolroom, feruled by the schoolmaster.

The master of the boats seldom punished him; the mariners treated him as a companion; most of his days he went to bed without having received a single blow. It was only at the hour of rising to go out on the sea that his mother was accustomed to frighten him with a few blows. However, he was proud of earning his own bread.

At seventeen years of age he was a strong

JOSÉ

boy, with regular features, although a little lined by the weather, slow in his movements like all seamen, speaking little and smiling sadly, subject to the maternal authority, the same as when he was seven years old.

On the sea he showed himself diligent and active, and for this reason, got up in the world sooner than others. When he was nineteen he was induced by the captain of a barque to quit the fisheries and sail on a vessel of an American line. He then tasted complete independence, although he voluntarily remitted to his mother a part of his wages. But his attachment to his native village, the recollection of the companions of his childhood, and, strange as it may seem, his love for his family, were potent in making him give up sailing the high seas, after some months, and undertake anew the business of fishing.

It was, however, with better preparation and tackle, for during his time as a sailor he had managed to add a little money to his own private account, and with this he bought a boat.

From that time his position was changed

JOSÉ

enough; the owner of a boat in a place as poor as Rodillero plays an important part. Among the seamen he was almost a personage, respect for his position uniting with appreciation of his courage and skill. He began his labors fortunately; after working for two years, as his necessities were not great, he had saved up enough to build another boat.

By this time he had fixed his mind on Elisa, who was most beautiful of the beauties of Rodillero, good, modest, industrious, and with the name of being rich. If he had not settled upon her himself, he would have been driven to it by the advice of his friends and the counsels of his village comrades.

“José, why don’t you court the daughter of the schoolmaster’s wife? There is nobody in Rodillero who would suit you so well”; or “José, you ought to marry the maestra’s daughter; there’s a lass who’s worth her weight in gold, kind and discreet; don’t be stupid.” “The best match for you, José, would be the maestra’s daughter.”

JOSÉ

He heard this repeated so much that at last he began to look at her with favoring eyes. On her side she heard like suggestions concerning the seaman. Wherever she chose to go; they did not tire of exaggerating to her his handsome presence, his industry and good behavior.

But José was excessively timid. As soon as he felt himself in love he became much more timid. For a long time the only sign he gave of the tender sentiment wherewith Elisa inspired him, was to follow her persistently with his eyes wherever he could find her, fleeing none the less from meeting her face to face. This did not hinder the young girl from perceiving very soon what was going on in the soul of the fisherman. And in like ratio she very soon began to direct towards him many of those flashing glances wherewith young ladies know how to illuminate the heart of a man in love.

José felt them, enjoyed them, but dared not take one step to bring himself nearer to her. One day he confessed to his friend Bernardo

JOSÉ

his tender trouble, and the lively desire he felt to speak with the daughter of the maestra. Bernardo laughed not a little at his timidity, and urged him strongly to conquer it; but the more he tried to, the less he succeeded.

Time passed and things remained in this state, to the visible annoyance of the young girl, who doubted if anything was ever going to be settled. Bernardo, observing his friend every day sadder and more diffident, determined to rescue him from his affliction. One afternoon when they had been at a religious festival they were both walking in a meadow somewhat apart from the other people who had been for the ramble, when they saw coming toward them, strolling also, several young girls. Elisa was among them. The merry mariner smiled mischievously, charmed with an idea that had in that moment occurred to him; he made several manœuvres, with the result of passing very near the girls, when it was possible, *zas!* he gave his friend a great push, knocking him against Elisa, saying at the same time :

JOSÉ

“There, Elisa, take José!”

Then he hurried himself away.

José, confused and blushing, remained face to face with the beautiful girl, who was also blushing and confused.

“Good afternoon,” he at last succeeded in saying.

“Good afternoon,” she responded, and it was an understood thing.

Love almost always seizes with violence men who are thoughtful, reserved and virtuous. The passion of José, the first and only one of his life, struck deep roots in a very little time. Elisa fully paid her debt of affection; the astute maestra showed herself propitious; at first everything smiled upon the enamored ones.

But behold, now, on the threshold of the door, when already the seaman touched his happiness with his hand, his bark began to take water. He remained stupefied and confused; his heart said to him that the obstacle was not one of little importance, perhaps seri-

JOSÉ

ous. A great sadness that resembled trouble spread throughout his being when he felt the door of Elisa shut behind him, and he stayed in the darkness of the street.

His imagination laid a cross of presentiment upon him; his heart oppressed him, and although he had not been hurrying, he paused an instant to get his breath. Afterwards, as he went on his way, he made vain efforts to banish the sadness by means of sensible reflections; all was not yet lost; Elisa's mother had not done more than postpone the marriage without opposing it. After all, without her consent, everything might come out right. Buried in his anxieties, he did not see until he ran against him, the form of a person who was coming up the street.

"*Buenos noches*, Don Fernando," he said, recognizing him.

"*Hola*, José; it delights me to fall in with you; you can tell me which is the best road to go to Robledal — I should say, to the house of Don Eugenio Soliva."

JOSÉ

“The best road is the Sarrio until you reach Antromero, and then take the Nueva, passing in front of the church. It is a little longer, but now in the night it would be dangerous to go by the shore road. But why do you make so long a journey at this hour? It is nearly two leagues.”

“I have some business to discuss with Don Eugenio,” said Señor de Meira, with a mysterious gesture.

The lips of the mariner drew into a slight smile.

“I am just going into the tavern to take something. Do you not wish to accompany me before going on your trip, Don Fernando?”

“Thank you, José. I accept your invitation, to give you a proof of my esteem for you,” replied Señor de Meira, putting a protecting hand upon the seaman’s shoulder.

Both entered the nearest tavern and found themselves in a corner apart. José ordered bread, cheese and wine. The Señor de Meira

JOSÉ

ate and drank with singular appetite, the young man observed out of the corner of his eye, and smiled. When this was ended they went out again into the street, and parted as good friends. The fisherman followed the gentleman an instant with his eyes and murmured :

“ Poor Don Fernando ! He was hungry ! ”

The figure of the other was lost in the shadows of night. He was going, as on many other occasions, to borrow money. Everybody in the village had remarked these secret excursions to neighboring places ; sometimes he extended his forays to the distant parts of the district, always by night, and with secrecy. Unfortunately, the Señor de Meira returned almost always as he had gone, — with an empty pocket ; but he was always erect and full of courage to undertake another campaign.

José followed his own way home, where he arrived in a few minutes. He found his mother in the kitchen, and with her his two sisters. The sight of them darkened yet more his face.

JOSÉ

These sisters, both older than he, had been married for a long time; one of them had six children. They lived, each one in her own house. The seaman knew by experience that they always joined with their mother, from whom they had inherited temper and tongue. Such an assembly at this unaccustomed hour seemed a very bad sign, and he who every day braved the wrath of ocean, felt himself trembling before three women united in the form of a tribunal. Before the threatened storm fell, he cut loose and tried to get away to bed, pretending fatigue.

“Aren’t you going to have your supper, José?” his mother asked him.

“I am not hungry. I took something at the tavern.”

“Have you made up your account with Isabel?”

This question was the first thunder-clap. José heard it with terror, answering, however, in an indifferent tone.

“It is already made up.”

JOSÉ

"And how much have you made out of this catch?" asked his mother, stirring the fire meanwhile, and affecting carelessness.

The second thunder-clap had cracked much nearer.

"I don't know," responded José, feigning indifference, as before.

"Have you not brought the money here?"

"Yes mother, but until to-morrow when I make up my account with the company, I can't fix the exact amount that belongs to me."

There was a long pause. The seaman, although his looks were towards the floor, felt the inquisitorial glances of his sisters upon his face, although they had not yet opened their mouths. His mother went on stirring the fire.

"And what did you put the bonito at to-day?" she said at last.

"As high as we could put it, mother; you know that," answered José, stammering.

"No, I don't know it," replied Teresa, letting the iron fall upon the hearth, and holding up her head resolutely.

JOSÉ

The mariner hung his own and stuttered rather than said: .

“At the current price, at a real and a half.”

“You lie, you lie!” she screamed furiously, advancing a step and fixing him with her flaming eyes.

“You lie, you lie!” cried almost in the same breath his two sisters.

José remained silent, without daring to excuse himself.

“We know it all, all!” went on Teresa in the same tone. “We know that you have deceived us miserably ever since the beginning of the fishing, you great scoundrel; that you have let that shameless woman make a lot out of the bonito, while your mother has been working like a dog, after having sweated all her life to maintain you.

“If you worked, it is because you wished to; I know that well enough,” said the seaman, meekly.

“And all for what?” continued Teresa, with-

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out wishing to hear her son's remark. "So that that shameless creature who makes you a laughing stock, who robs you of what you sweat for, making her daughter her bait; she will slam the door on your snout in the long run."

These words pierced José to the quick of the soul.

"Mother!" he exclaimed with emotion, "I do not know why you have taken such a spite against Elisa and her mother. When I am married I am not going to forsake you. The boat that I have now will still be for you, and if more is needed, more shall be had."

"But you really think yourself as good as married, innocent?" said one of his sisters, smiling sarcastically.

"This affair is none of your business," replied the seaman, turning towards her in wrath.

"Your sister is right. Idiot, idiot!" vociferated his mother once more. "Don't you see that those people are making me laughed at all over town? Can't you see that that witch is

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deceiving you like a simpleton just to suck your blood?"

The poor José, harassed in such cruel wise, could no longer keep his humble attitude towards his mother, and he replied, holding his head up with dignity :

" I am at liberty to do what I please with my own. You, mother, have nothing whatever to complain of. Until now all that I have earned has been yours —"

" And you throw that in my face, wretch!" she yelled, getting more and more furious. " Nothing was lacking me but that! After having borne so many troubles in bringing you up ; after having worn myself to shreds over the fish-kettles, and dragging myself around day and night to be able to get a bit of bread for you and your sisters, you insult me in this fashion ? "

Here Teresa threw herself into a chair and began to sob loudly.

" I wish I could have died before seeing myself insulted by my son," she went on between

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moans and tears. “Oh, let me die ! for I have only one son in the world, and he throws it in my face that he gives me my bread !”

And she kept it up in this way, letting herself go in groans and lamentations, shaking her head and lifting her hands to heaven. Her daughters hastened to give her attentions and consolation. José, frightened at the effect of his words, did not know what to do ; he had no spirit to answer his sisters, who while caring for their mother, turned on him in this way :

“Get out with you, wicked son ! You ought to be ashamed of yourself ! You want to kill your mother, don’t you ? Some day God will punish you for this !”

He weathered the squall resignedly, and when he saw his mother a little more quiet, he retired silently to his own quarters. He carried so heavy a heart that it was a long while before he could get to sleep.

V

WITH the coming of a new day his burden grew lighter. He understood clearly that he had no reason for being so much depressed. The obstacle that at night had seemed insuperable he felt by the light of the sun to be of little importance. He roused his spirits to conquer it, and hope returned to flood his soul.

And, indeed, events seemed to justify this sudden bound from sadness into joy. During the days following he found Elisa's mother more amiable than ever, helping on his love affair cordially, giving him to understand by her ways, if not exactly by her words, that he would sooner or later be the husband of Elisa. The girl recovered her confidence too, and began making castles in the air, hoping to vanquish the opposition of her mother and shorten the time of waiting for the wedding.

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Fortune, for that matter, continued to smile upon José. On St. John's Day, as he had expected, his new boat was launched; it danced off over the waves, light and free, promising many a good day of fishing; the curé had come and blessed it, and he afterwards had in the tavern the indispensable spree for the men who were chosen to man it. They entered upon their duties as soon as José took command of her, renting his old boat to another captain; and from the day following he began to work her in the bonito fishing. This was more abundant than is often seen, so much so that our mariner, in spite of the blood-letting Isabel gave him at every settling of accounts, was on the high road to become rich.

Elisa, at his urging, contrived to extract from her mother permission to be married at the end of the fishing season; that is to say, in the month of October. And the lovers slept sweetly upon this promise, enjoying the sweet prospect of an immediate union.

They entered upon that period of life, more

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pleasant than any other, when the sky offers nothing but smiles and the earth nothing but flowers to two who love. Work was for both of them an overflowing source of pleasure; every bonito that took José's line, and was brought flapping into his boat, seemed a herald announcing his wedding. When he returned home with two hundred pieces bursting his pockets and waistband, he thought that he had that day made a grand stride towards Elisa. She in the fish-house gave herself scarcely any rest; all day long she was busy in superintending the operations of weighing, cutting, salting, drying or packing the fish. When night arrived she was not able to stand upon her feet; but she dropped upon her bed with a smile on her lips, saying :

“It is necessary to work steadily; some day we shall have children.”

The happiest hour for Elisa was that just before supper; then José came to the shop and joined the salty assemblage, this permitted them to exchange many words and glances.

JOSÉ

They rarely talked of love ; there was no need of it. For those who love much all conversation whatever is drenched with love. At this time their happiest moments were those of parting ; she with lamp in hand, as we have seen her on the night that we first know her ; he ready to go, lingering on the threshold. In these moments alone they exchanged with trembling lip something of that which filled their hearts entirely, until the voice of Isabel, calling her daughter, grievously broke the enchantment.

There was yet another happy hour that the beautiful maiden enjoyed daily ; it was the hour of the siesta, when her mother, after having dined, lay down for a little while upon her bed. Elisa was accustomed to leave the house and go up on one of the little hills that surround the village, to enjoy the view and the freshness of the sea. At this hour during the July and August days, the heat was suffocating in Rodillero. The ocean breeze did not penetrate further than the first crooks and turns of

JOSÉ

the place, leaving the greater part of it stifled between the mountains on either side.

The young girl ascended slowly, by a broad way opening through the pines, up to the chapel of San Esteban, on the top of the mountain, and seated herself there in the shade. From that point a great expanse of sea could be seen, over which the sun irradiated his fire; the heavens were blue, dark above the land lighter above sea, transformed into a gray where the horizon shut down. A few white and swelling clouds were piled up in the east, over the peak of Peñas, the one nearest to the Cantabrian coast. That, and the other distant headlands, scarcely showed in the gray line of horizon, while the nearer San Antonio, behind which was the bay of Sarrío, showed a lovely orange color.

The eyes of Elsa quickly sought on the far spaces of the sea the fishing boats that, as usual, kept out a long distance in front of the mouth of the Rodillero bay, almost lost to sight in the ashen haze that hung over the horizon. Her

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glance ranged rapidly over several white pages, and she tried to give herself the illusion that she could remember which one of them was the *base of her inspiration*.

"That was, going a little way apart to the left, that must be the one. I know it because the tail is white; here now it is black! Then, yes, he always likes to go a little apart and work independent of the others. I have a memory and make the best of it like him!"

And, following this happy, she followed rapidly the movements of the bunch, which now were not much nearly lost to sight or again there again. Sometimes she would see that they were all making their way back to port, then would realize with a very fast:

"That red! today there are not many *bonnets*!"

But in the depths of her soul, pleasure mingled with her sorrow, for by this manner she was going to see her lover again. She waited a little while until she saw these strange birds by little from the others report that on

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wrapped them and enter into the luminous region. They seemed, with their pointed sails, like white spectres gliding gently over the waters ; and, as if obedient to a sign made by an invisible hand, they all drew near together and in a short time formed into a little squadron.

When she saw them drawing near she went down into the village as far as she could ; she told nobody, not even José himself, of those moments of happiness that she enjoyed in the solitude of the mountain of San Estéban.

The time went slipping away, not so fast as our lovers desired, but much more so than suited the seña Isabel. She was not able to think of the marriage of Elisa without a sensation of terror and anger, for when that should come to pass she would be obliged to let the factory and other property of her dead husband go into the control of her daughter. And although she was resolved in whatever case to oppose this marriage with all her power, she was, however, to her disgust, obliged to use skill not to make manifest her opposition,

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fearing that love would lead Elisa into some act of rebellion. For this reason her mind was overflowing with wickedness, nor did she cease working to devise means to break the knot and get out of keeping the promise that had been extracted from her. At last she thought she found one free from danger by means of a certain infamous machination that the devil himself doubtless suggested to her, standing unveiled beside her bed.

There was in the town a young man who had among the people the name of being foolish, or crack-brained, son of the sacristan of the parish; he was now fully twenty years of age and he did not know his letters. He never did anything except to take care of the grounds around the church (to be sure, with masterly art) and roam alone along the shores of the sea, getting shell-fish out of the coves, crabs, snails, and so on. In these operations he was also a master. The boys mocked at him, and often ran after him through the streets with an intolerable racket. That which most plagued poor Rufo (such was

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his name) was to be told that his house was falling down. This was enough for the children to stab him to the heart without ever getting tired of it; wherever he chose to go he would hear a childish voice yelling at him from near or far—usually far:

“It’s falling down, Rufo! It’s down!”

The unfortunate was as much irritated by hearing this as if it were a gory insult. His eyes would shoot fire, and he would foam at the mouth, and in this temper he would run like a wild beast after the urchin, who would take good care on the instant to put plenty of distance between, the more the better. Sometimes the excess of his wrath made Rufo fall senseless upon the ground. The neighbors pitied him, and did not cease from sharply reproving the boys for their cruelty that caused such scenes.

It was known in the village that Rufo nourished in his bosom a lively and ardent passion for the daughter of the maestra: this served also as a pretext for making fun of him, though in this case it was the men who amused themselves.

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When he passed before a group of seamen it almost always called forth some mention of Elisa; sometimes they would tell him that she was married that morning, which would make him stiff with anguish: another day they would advise him to go and ask the seña Isabel for Elisa's hand, because she knew on good authority that her child was secretly enamored of him, or tell him that he could carry her off if her mother would not consent to make them happy. Sometimes they mingled José's name with these jests, calling him names, ugly, a schemer, a bad fisherman, which would make the idiot laugh and jump with joy. They would declare Rufo a paragon, assuring him that he was incomparably more elegant, and if he did not fish so much, he did much better in the fields. In this fashion, in proportion as his affection for Elisa grew in the heart of the fool, his hatred of José, whom he considered his mortal enemy, grew also, even to the point that he could never encounter him without being sure to cast wrathful glances upon him and mutter threatening

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words, at all of which, naturally, the lucky mariner but laughed.

Elisa laughed also at this love, which flattered, none the less, her womanly vanity; for admiration is acceptable, even if it comes from fools.

Whenever she met Rufo in the street she put on a charming face and talked to him in the protecting and kindly tones that she used for children; she would pat him as she would a faithful dog and say, yes, of course she would have him if he would always obey his father and not pitch into the street boys.

“But when?” Rufo would ask anxiously.

“I don’t know, my friend,” she would reply. “You must ask the holy image and let us see.”

And the poor thing would spend whole hours upon his knees in the church beseeching the celebrated Cristo of Rodillero to know when his wedding would be, without getting an answer.

“Perhaps he does not wish us to be married,” he would say to Elisa, “but have patience and

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all will be well. He is beginning to be conciliated."

Isabel conceived the idea of using the passion of this crack-brain to break off, or at least to postpone, the union of her daughter with José. One day she went out and walked up the seashore where she knew Rufo would be found catching crabs, and met him, as if by chance.

"Well, how goes it, Rufo? Are you getting many?"

The crank lifted his head and smiled on seeing the mother of Elisa.

"Bad job; he catch little," he answered in the peculiar sort of clipped-off language that he used.

"Come, come, it's not so little," replied Isabel, approaching and giving a look at the basket where the shell-fish were. "Your father is lucky to have you bringing home a basketful of crabs every day."

"Father no like crabs, throw all in the street, and beats Rufo with a stick."

JOSÉ

“He beats you because you catch crabs?”

“Yes, seña Isabel.”

“But your father has not good taste. Crabs are very nice. Look! when your father does not want the crabs, bring them to me, to Elisa who likes them very much.”

The lank, sullen face of the crank was quickly illumined on hearing the name of Elisa.

“Does Elisa like crabs?”

“Very much.”

“All, Elisa; all Elisa,” he said with emphasis, throwing out his hands and indicating all the shore of the sea.

“Thank you, Rufo; thank you. You like Elisa very much, don’t you?”

“Yes, seña Isabel; I like Elisa very much.”

“You would be glad to marry her?”

The face of the fool was contracted into a smile; he stood confused and abashed, looking at Isabel without daring to reply.

“Come, speak; would you marry her?”

“You no want,” he said at last, timidly.

“I don’t wish it? Who told you so?”

JOSÉ

“You want José.”

“Bah! if José were poor I shouldn’t want him. You suit me much better. You are more enterprising, and there isn’t any one in Rodillero who is like you in the fields.”

“José doesn’t know how,” said the idiot with a triumphant accent, showing a great delight.

“How could he know how! José doesn’t know anything except to go fishing for bonito and cod.”

“And bream,” added Rufo, passing suddenly from joy to sadness.

“Very well, bream too. What of it? Instead of those, you fish for crabs and sea-urchins and oysters. Then, too, you fish by yourself, without any help from anybody, while José is obliged to have help from his friends. Will you tell me how José could fish if he had not a boat?”

“Has two,” Rufo pointed out mournfully.

“Well, the old one is worth little. If it wasn’t for the new one, if it wasn’t *for the new*

JOSÉ

boat, I should not give Elisa to him, do you know that?"

The meek, watery eyes of the idiot glittered for an instant with an expression of ire.

"I sink new boat," he exclaimed, striking the rock with the claws he held in his hand.

"Besides José has duties that he is obliged to perform," went on the old woman, as if she had not heard these words. "He has to support his mother, who will soon be unable to work, while you are free. Your father earns enough to take care of himself; then you have a rich brother in Havana."

"I have a watch," said Rufo, interrupting her.

"Yes, I know it."

"And a chain it hangs on, seña Isabel."

"I know it, I know it. You would have it just the same if you married my daughter. You would be master of the factory and earn a great deal of money, and buy a horse to go to the picnics with Elisa, you in front and she

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behind, as the Señor Cura of Amedo with his housekeeper, and you would have riding-boots like the son of Don Casimiro.

The old woman unfolded a picture of innocent happiness, without forgetting any detail, however foolish it might be, that could flatter the fool. He listened to her, amazed and charmed, smiling beatifically, as if he found himself before a celestial vision. When Isabel finished her description, there was silence for a short time; at last she spoke again, shaking her head sorrowfully :

“If it were not for José!”

And she stood gazing meditatively at the sea.

Rufo trembled as if he had been wounded; then his face darkened and he also looked fixedly out to the horizon.

“Well, Rufo, I must be going home where Elisa will already be expecting me. *Hasta la vista.*”

“*Adios,*” said the *tonto*, without turning his head in the least.

JOSÉ

Isabel went away slowly. When she was already at a great distance, she turned to look at him. He remained still immovable, with his eyes gazing out to sea, as she had left him.

VI

IT happened, as it did every year, that the too great number of Vizcayan boats caused some trouble in Rodillero towards the end of the bonito fishing season. There were so many craft coming in all at once to the shore in the afternoons that the fishermen were not all able to make a landing; for however far up were the first ones that arrived from sea, the last ones found no place, and their owners were compelled to leave them to the mercy of the tide, fastened to the others.

This caused some irritation and restlessness; there was murmuring enough, and at last a good deal of complaint to the harbor-master; but this did not hinder the Vizcayans from continuing in the port, as long as the province of Sarrio did not order them away. The quarrels, however, were not as many nor as bitter as might have been expected, owing

JOSÉ

to the peaceable temper of both the Vizcayans and the natives.

Meantime the weather was propitious (as it always is there in the months of June, July and August) and all went on well enough; but when September arrived, the discord and complaints increased with the danger to the boats that remained afloat. Although the sky showed itself serene during this month and the wind did not blow hard, there was frequently a ground swell, caused by tempests that raged in distant regions. The heavy seas that prevail on that coast the larger part of the autumn made the smack-owners anxious; they feared that in some least expected hour the lashings of the boats would be broken asunder, and they driven ashore on the rocks.

It was only necessary to go down to the shore at night to see that such fears were well-founded. The sea danced the boats about, knocking one against another tremendously and clashing those that remained out in front, producing in the silence and the darkness a noise like that of a

JOSÉ

troubled multitude; it seemed sometimes like a wise conversation that they held one with another, a discussion concerning the varied chances of their dangerous life. At other times it was a hot dispute, wherein all joined at once and gave their opinions; again, it was a grave and glowing battle in which some were going to be destroyed and perish.

An unfortunate event came at last to uphold those who were most dissatisfied, and they begged with more eagerness for the departure of the Vizcayans. On a certain dark, calm night of the month referred to, the conversation of the boats began at an early hour to be very animated; soon it degenerated into disputes that at times grew warm. About one o'clock in the morning there was a veritable battle of the boats, most unusual, such as had never before been seen among them. The Vizcayans, who slept on board, found themselves obliged to get up in the greatest hurry, and to manage skillfully in order not to suffer any damage. For more than an hour they struggled valiantly to

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prevent the ruin of many boats, their own as well as those of Rodillero, and the desertion of others; then the hauling and straining was terrible and there was danger that the cables would all be broken. As this went on, the ground swell doubled in energy, with such fury that, fearing certain catastrophe, some one ran into the town and gave the alarm. The greater number of men, and many women, immediately ran to the rescue. When they arrived, some of the boats were already adrift from the continued onsets of the sea.

A Vizcayan called loudly at José's door.

"José, get up and come! You are going to lose your boat."

The seaman sprang in alarm from his bed, threw on his jacket and trousers hastily, and ran bare-headed to the shore. Before he had nearly reached it, his trained ear perceived, amid the clamor of the waves, a dry, grating noise of the worst possible augury. He stood stupefied at the spectacle that met his view.

There was a great sea on; the flotilla of

JOSÉ

boats that had remained moored outside was all in a swirl and a whirl; the attack was being repeated. Between the clamors of the waves could be heard yet more clearly that dry noise like crunching of stones. Joined with this threatening sound were the voices of men, whose shadows moved quickly back and forth in the darkness, as they tried to save their boats, mutually reproaching each other for not avoiding the collision of their boats, begging for ropes for fastening them; getting them separated, loosened and cut apart at any cost; cries of women fearing for the lives of their men, as well as for the safety of the boats; answering the men with shrieks and terrible exclaimings; all this made up an infernal noise inspiring grief and terror. The darkness was not so thick that it did not permit the boats to be seen; many of them carried lanterns that moved and swayed from one side to another like shooting stars.

Recovering from his surprise, José ran to the spot where he had left his new boat, which had been in peril ever since the old woman had

JOSÉ

taken a dislike to it. His fears, however, were not great, because he had had the luck to get in in time to anchor behind a cliff that jutted into the sea, forming a natural wall. He jumped into the first boat by the beach, and went out from one to another until he reached the place where he had left his own, but on getting there he found that she had disappeared. In vain his eyes searched round about; in vain he asked questions of his comrades; nobody could give any account of her. At last one who was carrying a lantern called to him from the land :

“José, a while ago I saw a boat drift out. I don’t know if she was yours.”

And poor José received a blow on the heart; it could not be any other, for all the rest were there.

“If she was yours, she can’t have got very far adrift,” said a seaman beside him. “There has been too little wind from outside; the waves will soon bring her in shore.”

These words were spoken with the intention of giving some consolation, and nothing more ;

JOSÉ

he who uttered them knew well that such a swell as was on that night would drag it out to sea rather than cast it upon land.

Nevertheless, José took heart of hope.

“ Gaspar, give me the lantern ! ” he called to the man on shore.

“ Where are you going ? ”

“ Up shore to see if I can find her. ”

The seaman who had consoled him, touched with pity, said :

“ I will go with you, José. ”

The man with the lantern said the same. And the three together went rapidly up the Rodillero coast close by the edge of the sea, carefully examining all the places where they thought the boat might have been able to run aground. After having made their way about a mile along the cliffs, they came out upon a wide, sandy beach ; it was where José had chiefly fixed his hopes. If the boat had come ashore there, she was saved. But they went over all the place in vain ; there was nothing there.

“ It seems to me that it is useless to go any

JOSÉ

farther, José," said Gaspar; "the path along the cliffs will be under water. It is already coming in."

José insisted on going on; he hoped to find his boat in the little bay of Los Angeles. But the shore proved to be covered by the tide which was coming in, and the waves of the sea splashed them as they went. One of them at last completely soaked José and put out the lantern. Then the other seamen resolutely refused to go another step. Nobody had any matches to light it again, and to go further without light was to risk losing one's head, or at least, a leg, among the rocks of the cliffs. José tried to induce them to come on, but they refused to follow.

He remained alone in the shadows between the mountain that raised its peak above his head, and the raging and boiling sea whose waves, as they broke upon the land, seemed like enormous black jaws seeking to swallow him. But our seaman was not to be stopped, neither by waves nor by darkness. He went

JOSÉ

on, springing from rock to rock, improving lulls in the storm to get over the more difficult places, going on until he arrived, late enough, at the bay of Los Angeles. However, he saw nothing there, although he took plenty of time to examine all the base of the cliffs that shut it in.

Worn out at last and used up, with bleeding feet, drenched and done, he walked homeward.

When he reached the great beach near Rodillero day had already dawned. The sun glittered above the horizon, and commenced to rise gloriously in a sky azure and serene. The water was still extremely boisterous. The sea that washed the coast was wild, as it always is when there is a ground-swell in its depths, and it threw itself angrily upon the rocks, dashing noisily against them. Sometimes it completely covered them with a white mantle of foam; at other times it climbed up them full of anger, and before reaching the top, fell backward palpitating. Now it contented itself with entering, armed, all the holes and hollows to find out if there was any enemy hidden there, and give

JOSÉ

him his death; and, finding none on whom to wreak its fury, retreated groaning and murmuring threats to return, and with more force, to the charge.

Upon the broad, sandy beach came the waves in serried ranks, renewed without ceasing; they formed a high and formidable line of battle, shaking their manes of foam, advancing majestically upon the golden floor, expecting to meet with resistance, but, seeing an open field, let themselves fall idly, succumbing to no adversary except their own weight and vigor. And after these came others, and others in the next instant, and still others, and thus forever without giving any truce; and there in the distance were columns of infinite legions of them hastening wrathful and bristling from every part of the world to the succor of their companions.

The tremendous agitation of the ocean, mysteriously moved, its confused vibrations extending along the vague line of the horizon, formed a singular contrast to the smiling serenity of the firmament.

JOSÉ

José stayed his steps a moment before the waves and contemplated the panorama with the interest of the mariner that is never exhausted; there was neither rancor nor despair in his look. Accustomed to hold life and possessions in the power of the sea, and to be routed in the struggles that they sustain with it, fishermen endure its unkindnesses with resignation, and respect its wrath as that of an angered and omnipotent God. In that moment José was more preoccupied with a bark that he could see there on the far horizon battling with the waves than with his own boat. After having observed its manœuvres with intelligent attention for some time, he went on his way towards the village. At a distance from the first houses he was struck with a very mournful thought: he thought that the loss of the boat was again going to put off his marriage, already far enough off; and it was then only that, realizing that he was wet and half naked, he commenced to shiver violently.

VII

THE damage caused in Rodillero by the ground-swell was found to be considerable, four or five boats destroyed and the greater part of the others injured. The Vizcayans, who fancied themselves the cause of the trouble, and who were in reality, although unintentionally, wandered about, confused and stunned. When the seas went down two days later they hoisted sail for their own country, leaving the port more free and the town at peace.

José's boat was the only one carried away by the waters, which caused discussion, because the ropes that held it were not destroyed, but had been all carried off with the boat. This was not easy to explain, supposing, as was logical, that they had been tied.

When the waters went down and José got up his fore anchor, such as the boats used, great was his surprise to see that the cable was not

JOSÉ

worn through by the force of the strain upon it, but had been cut by a knife or razor. He tried in vain to explain this extraordinary phenomenon by natural causes. All the beating of his brain was futile before the reality that confronted it. At last, in spite of himself, there budded in his soul the suspicion that a traitorous hand had been at work. But this caused him yet greater surprise. There was nobody in the place, he knew of, capable of such villainy; and in order not to accuse any one wrongfully in his mind, he, with his accustomed loyalty, did his best to forget his terrible discovery. The loss of the boat did not cast down his soul, far from it; but the consequences that it brought filled him with bitterness.

The seña Isabel seemed very sympathetic with his trouble. She gave herself over to groans and laments; she broke out into violent invectives against the Vizcayans. In every word she let fall, indeed, it was clear that she considered the accident very grave.

“Is n’t it a shame that those sponging Viz-

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cayans should be the cause of the ruin of the folks in Rodillero?" and, turning to José, "Don't grieve, my dear, don't grieve that you have been left ruined. God will not fail you, as He never has failed you. Work with faith, for while one is young there is always hope of bettering one's fortunes."

These words of consolation profoundly discouraged our mariner, because they let him know plainly that there was no use talking of his marriage at present. And, indeed, he let the days go by without uttering anything whatever about it, either before the *máestra*, or when he was alone with his betrothed. But the gloom that was reflected upon his face acknowledged perfectly the weight which lay upon his spirit. He had to make an effort to appear cheerful and smiling when in the schoolmaster's shop, and to join pleasantly in the conversation; but all at once he would become very serious without being able to help it, and pass his hand across his forehead in a depressed way.

Something similar happened to Elisa. She

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also understood that it was useless to speak of the wedding to her mother, and tried to hide her restlessness, without succeeding. In the brief conversations that she had with José, neither one nor the other dared say anything on that subject; but in the quiver of the voice, in the long, sad looks that they gave each other, and in the slight trembling of their hands in parting, was shown most clearly, without need of explanation, that the same thought had made them both unhappy. The worst of all was that they could not tell when their anxieties might be allayed, nor think when José could save up enough to buy another boat; it would cost so much that their union must be postponed several years.

While the lovers were suffering in this way, the rumor began to spread through the village, without any one's knowing how it started, that the loss of José's boat had not been accidental, but intentional. The fact of her having carried off all her fastenings lent itself clearly to this supposition; and further, it was well known

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that the cable of the anchor was not worn through, but cut.

Teresa was one of the first who observed this, and with the peculiar intuition of the woman of ardent temperament, she put her finger at once on the wound:

“The maestra’s hand has been at work here!”

In vain her friends insinuated that there were those in the place who were envious of José and of his luck; she did not care to hear them.

“Nobody wishes ill to my son; even though there may be some who are envious of him, there are none who are capable of doing him an injury.”

And from this nobody could move her. Thinking of her enemy stirred up her bile to a degree that was fearful; during those first days scarcely anybody dared speak to her; she grew blue and jaundiced, and spent her time growling about the house like a ravening wild beast.

At last one day she planted herself before José with her arms akimbo:

“How much will you bet that your sweet-

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heart's mother will never have her neck wrung?"

José stood still, astonished.

"Why, mother?" he asked with trembling voice.

"Because I say so; because I hope she will! What have you to say to that?" she returned, looking at him loftily. Knowing his mother well, he waited for her to unbosom herself.

Seeing that he made no reply, Teresa proceeded, passing suddenly from her apparent calm into a furious exaltation.

"Yes; one day she will be stripped of the few duds she has, and dragged down on the shore, the low-lived, dirty wretch, the shameless creature!"

And she went on, running over eagerly all the catalogue of insults.

José remained mute while the hail-storm lasted. When she grew quiet, he asked her once more:

"Why, mother?"

"Why? Why? Because she did it, that

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infamous thing ; it was she who made you lose your boat.”

“ And how do you know this ? ” asked the fisherman calmly.

Teresa did not know, far from it ; but her anger made her maintain in that moment that she did, that she knew it of certain knowledge ; and having no reasons or data to show in support of affirmations, she upheld them with yells, insults and threats.

José tried earnestly to dissuade her ; he represented to her the grave wrong there was in charging any one whatever with such a crime without being sure of it, but the widow did not care to listen to him. She went on growing angrier and making more threats. Then the seaman, much distressed, thinking that if his mother went so far as to prove what she said, his relations with Elisa would be broken off forever, exclaimed in anguish :

“ Mother, I beg you, for God’s sake, not to make me lose my all ! ”

The accent wherewith he uttered these words

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was so full of woe that it touched the heart of Teresa, which was not perverse, except when it was blinded by wrath. There was a moment of suspense; she murmured a few more hard words, then she let herself calm down, and promised to keep quiet. But in three or four days, in a spasm of ill-humor, she broke out once more in threats against her enemy. This made José go about sorrowful and alarmed, expecting that in some hour, when least looked for, a scandal would be stirred up that would ruin his already unstable engagement.

Teresa would not be pacified; she wished at all costs to convert into certainty the suspicion that gnawed in her heart. She ran about to the houses of the village, questioning her friends, investigating with more cunning and ability than an experienced agent of the police. At last she found that, a few days before the event, Isabel had had a long chat with Rufo on the seashore. This fact flooded the dark subject with light; the maestra was the mind and Rufo was the arm that had committed the crime.

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Then Teresa, to get proof, made use of a means as appropriate to her genius as it was opportune at that season. She immediately looked up Rufo; finding him on the water-front, surrounded by a few seamen who were amusing themselves by joking him, and going straight up to him without warning, darts of anger shooting from her eyes, she said to him :

“So ’twas you, you big rascal, who loosed the moorings of my son’s boat, so that it got adrift ! Well, you’re going to die by my hand for that, and now !”

The idiot, surprised at this attack, fell into the trap, started a few steps backward, grew horribly pale, and throwing up his hands, began, full of fear, to cry :

“Fo’give me, seña Telesa ; fo’give me, seña Telesa !”

Then she tried persuading him. In place of going on in a vexed and threatening voice, she let a smile of triumph appear upon her face.

“Hola ! Then it was you who did it ? But the idea of this crime never started with you.

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You are too much of a fool! Some one put you up to that. It was the maestra who advised you to do it, wasn't it?"

The idiot, recovered a bit from his surprise, and warned by that smile, had sufficient cunning not to compromise the mother of his idol.

"No, señola; no señola. I did it 'lone."

Teresa tried perseveringly to wrench the secret from him, but it was in vain. Rufo held fast. The seamen, tired of such a row, said with one voice:

"Clear out; let him alone, seña Teresa! You'll never get to the bottom of it."

The widow, persuaded as much as if she had evidence that the author of the misfortune was Elisa's mother, and mad and infuriated that she had not been able to wring it out of the idiot, ran directly to her house.

Isabel was sewing in the door of the shop. Teresa saw her from afar and called out to her in facetious tones:

"Hola, seña maestra, are you sewing? I am coming to help you a little bit."

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There is no knowing whether Isabel found something extraordinary in that voice, nor what she might have seen in the eyes of the widow as she lifted her head. What is certain is that she rose quickly from her chair, went inside with it and shut the door, all with such haste that however fast Teresa hurried, she was not able to get there.

Defrauded, she flung herself against the door, screaming:

“You hide, sneak! You hide, do you?”

On the instant Isabel appeared at the window, saying with affected tranquillity:

“No, I am not hiding. Here I am.”

“Come down a moment, señora,” returned Teresa, covering the threatening tone she used with a smile.

“Why should I care to come down? To see better that hag’s face that you carry?”

This cruel insult was uttered serenely, almost amiably. Teresa returned it bravely, feeling the sting of it, and began throwing stones at the window, yelling:

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“Come down so that I can pull out your snake’s tongue and throw it to the dogs, you vicious impudence!”

Several of the curious were already about the widow; others flocked to the windows of neighboring houses with visible satisfaction. The tragi-comedy opened. In Rodillero quarrels between women are frequent; it is logical there should be, given the lively and excitable disposition of most of them. Lack of education, the absence of the amenities usual among the common people, make them go into details, especially of a gross and repugnant sort. Further, in Rodillero, the fishwives’ rows hold somewhat of special and traditional. The disputes of the women of this fishing village have enjoyed a fame in Asturias from very ancient times; and it is known that there are none more shameless and terrible than they when they let themselves loose. So it is that, accustomed to be present and take part more or less from the time they are little girls, almost all of them know enough of the art of wrangling, and some

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of them carry it so far as to become consummate mistresses of it.

This accomplishment is not very occult. One says to one's self, for example: "Fulana fights well; Zutana flames up excessively soon; Mengana yells and says nothing, like the famous orators in Madrid, when they explain and expound." There was once, long ago, a person in Rodillero who eclipsed all the fighting females of the place, and routed them every time he entered the lists with them; this was a man, although in his tastes and inclinations he had much of the woman. He was called, or called himself, Pedro Regalado, but nobody knew him by any other name than that of "that milksop of a Don Simpleton."

Teresa, although she had quarrelled innumerable times, had not arrived at acquiring, thanks to her natural impetuosity, the degree of perfection that the rhetoric of her companions required; that veiling of insults so as to wound your adversary without exposing one's self; that raising and lowering of the voice in the fit-

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ness of time; the insinuating gesture, the ironic smile, the moving away majestically and coming back with a new insult in the mouth. Isabel, because of her somewhat superior position, seldom descended to the disputes of the streets; but she was commonly feared for her sharpness and malevolence.

"It is time that they threw you to the dogs, poor creature," she said, answering without emotion the terrible threat of Teresa.

"They want you! Throw me to the dogs! To begin with, I want to be thrown where I can beg alms, since I have been robbed!"

"What have you been robbed of?"

"My son's new boat, you infamous one!"

"How could I swallow your son's boat? I don't believe my gullet is big enough."

The by-standers laughed. Teresa, enraged, screamed.

"Laugh, fiend, laugh! Everybody in town knows that it was you who put the sacristan's fool up to cutting the cables of the boat."

The maestra grew pale and remained for an

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instant stupefied: but recovering herself at once, she said:

“That which the whole town knows is that you are crazy and ought to be locked up.”

“Locked up!” You will soon be in jail yourself. You are going to be taken to jail, or there is no such thing as law.”

“Calm yourself, idiot, calm yourself,” said the maestra, letting a smile appear upon her lips; “don’t you see that they are laughing at you?”

“To jail! to jail!” repeated the widow violently, and turning to those standing about, she asked earnestly:

“Have you ever seen a more dreadful woman? Her mother died of a blow that this *bribona* gave her with a frying-pan. You all know that very well. She drove her brother away from home and obliged him to enlist. As for her husband, who was a good man, she let him die like a dog without a doctor or medicines, so as not to spend a few pence that were his own, all the same, and if she does not make

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away with the one she has now, it is because he is a soft fellow who doesn't hinder her in anything whatever."

At this moment Don Claudio, who was standing behind his wife without daring to interfere in the contest, shook his head, his face still more humble and more ugly from the indignation that it reflected, saying:

"Calm yourself, impudence! You shall see! I shall inform the señor Alcalde of you."

But the maestra, who had by great labor controlled her ire, now found a means to express herself, and throwing out her arm, gave him a tremendous back-handed blow in the face. The poor pedagogue, chastised thus unexpectedly, only found spirit to exclaim, throwing up his hands sorrowfully:

"Wife! you! why do you slap me?"

Teresa was so much engrossed in the enumeration of her enemy's iniquities that she did not observe this cheerful incident, and went on talking to the crowd that gathered about her:

"Now she steals her daughter's money, that

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which her dead husband inherited from his ancestors, and she won't let Elisa marry, so that she would have to let go of the money. Before getting her teeth out of that——"

Isabel burst out in loud, strident laughter.

"Come, it's out at last! You're offended because I don't wish my child to marry yours, are n't you? You want to get your claws into my money and amuse yourself with it, don't you? Root, poor thing, root! Your greasy snout will miss it, though!"

The widow grew red as fire.

"Neither my son nor I are in need of your money. What we want is not to be robbed. Thief! thief! thief! thief!"

The fury that possessed her made her repeat this insult innumerable times, rendering her liable to be arrested. In exchange the maestra managed to insult her outrageously, without risking herself.

"Who has been robbing you, poor simpleton? Those who have will find that they have got nothing when it is done!"

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"Thief! thief! thief!" yelled the widow, who was choked with passion.

"Calm yourself, stupid, calm yourself," said Isabel, without dropping the smile from her lips. "Come, let us see. You don't wish me to call you — *that!*"

"You won't stop short of the gallows, bri-bona!"

"Don't keep on until I call you *that*, because I don't wish to. And you will drive me to it, in spite of myself!" And turning to the bystanders she cried jestingly: "Isn't this woman a stubborn thing? She would keep on until I call her *that!* and I don't want to. And I, I don't want to!"

In saying these words, Isabel flung out her arms with resolution so extravagant that it excited the laughter of all present.

The rage of Teresa carried her to the last extremes; the insults that issued from her mouth were most gross and terrible.

However grand may be our love of truth, and however lively the desire to represent faithfully a

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scene of so much celebrity, the respect that we owe to our readers obliges us to stop. Your imagination will readily be able to supply the rest.

The quarrel went on getting hotter for a long time and in the same fashion. Isabel fenced with sneers and sarcasms. Teresa hurled all imaginable outrages at her. She accompanied the violence of her words with like action, raging back and forth with tremendous rapidity; she went round and round like a top, throwing out her arms in all directions; she tore off her kerchief from her throat which was choking her; all her body trembled as if it were submitted to a magnetic current. More than a hundred times she got away from the place, and as many more returned, to hurl with hoarse voice a new insult in the face of her enemy. At last, used up with so much exertion, and with voice almost exhausted, she took herself off for good. The curious ones lost sight of her in the windings of the street. The seña Isabel, victorious, cried once again from the window:

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“Run away, run away! Go home and take some lime-juice and orange-flower water, so that you won’t be struck with paralysis, and give it up!”

Teresa, indeed, was suffering with her heart and only gave out when she began to feel pain. When she reached home, she fell down in a fit so serious that it was necessary to call in the village doctor in great haste.

VIII

WHEN José came in from the sea that evening and learned what had taken place, he experienced the fiercest grief of his life. He did not realize it thoroughly, it is true, until after his mother had got over her fit. The attention that she required and the anxiety that she inspired made him forget, for the moment, his own unhappiness. But it grew greater for two or three days; he felt the force and cruelty of a wound in his soul that had been on the point of healing. Not a word of recrimination issued from his lips concerning this; he buried his pain in the deeps of his breast, and went on performing his daily task with the same apparent interest. But on coming in from the sea evenings, instead of going to the maestra's shop or to the tavern to spend some time with his friends as formerly, he shut himself up at home as soon as he had despatched his busi-

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ness with his fish, and did not come out again until the hour for embarking next day.

This resignation mortified Teresa more than a quarrel once an hour; she went about anxious and shamefaced; the heart of the mother suffered in the mute grief of her son; although she had by no means quenched the blaze of anger in her soul, and madly desired to wreak overwhelming vengeance upon the seña Isabel, hoping to make her feel something like remorse. But this did not hinder her from bringing suit against the sacristan for the damages caused by his son Rufo, who by his mental weakness was not responsible before the law. And as this had been well proved, the judge of Sarrio condemned the sacristan at last to shut the idiot up at home, and to make good to José the value of the boat. The first was done on the spot; the second was not so easy to put into complete effect, because the sacristan lived upon the limited emoluments paid him by the curé, and had no other means. When the notary seized his property he found it necessary to take

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his furniture, his kitchen utensils and his bed-clothes, everything that he had, old and new, in order to get together the least bit of money. But the sacristan's wife must have cared for them as if they were gold and ivory, to judge by the floods of tears that it cost her to part with them.

This woman bore the name of a witch in the village; mothers looked at her with alarm, and took great care that she should not kiss their little ones. Men consulted her sometimes when they were going on a long voyage, to know how it would turn out. Instead of trying to dislodge this opinion, she worked it up by her conduct, the same as in other days did some of the unhappy ones that the Inquisition condemned to the flames; it was her feminine vanity that carried her into these devious ways. She would tell fortunes by cards or by the lines of the hand; she could remove the spell from those who could not marry, giving love-powders to cause one to become the darling of the desired, and she gave herself airs of sufficiency and

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an appearance of mystery that greatly excited the imaginations of the poor fisher folk.

On seeing her furniture carried out of her house, she burst forth with maledictions against Teresa and her son, so frightful that she horrified those curious ones, who, as is usual in such cases, had followed the notary and the constable:

“God grant this miserable woman may be brought down to beg in the streets, and that she may be hanged at last as a thief. God grant that whatever she eats may poison her. God grant that some day when her son goes out on the sea, he does not return!”

While the officers of justice were performing their task, she ceased not to invoke heaven and hell against her enemies. The neighbors who were present went away appalled.

“For all that Don Anacleto possesses,” said an old mariner to those who were going with him, “I would not be to-day in the skin of the widow’s José. There is something to be afraid of in that woman’s curses.”

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“It can’t be so bad,” replied the other, who was younger and more unprejudiced.

“I tell you it is so. You are a young man, and not able to recollect; but here are Casimirio and Juan who know very well what happened to me through her some years ago. I went one evening to the shore to go out for cod, when she called to me begging me to take her Rufo aboard with me and make him boy on my boat. I refused her, of course, for that dunce never was good for anything. She went off at once against me like a mad dog, heaping insults and curses on me. I made haste on my way and got on board. We reached our cod-banks about nine o’clock and cast our lines until daybreak. Would you believe it, we had not more than three bites from the cod! The other boats came in eighty, a hundred, and there were even some as high as one hundred and thirty apiece. The next day I had about the same luck, and the next day the same, and the next the same. At last, my boy, I had no resource but to go to her house and beg her,

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for the love of God, to lift her curse from off me."

The old mariners confirmed what their companions declared. When the rest of the neighbors heard of the tremendous maledictions made by the sacristan's wife, they also were sincerely sorry for José. Even Teresa herself, if the truth were told, was frightened, all the more that she tried to conceal her fear.

At the hour of supper Isabel, who had heard of it all in the street, let her daughter know about it with the greatest pleasure.

"Have you heard the news, Elisa?"

"What?"

"That to-day the furniture of Eugenia, the sacristana, was seized for what her son Rufo did to José's boat. But, look you, I would n't be either in José's shoes, or in his mother's. That woman's curses do not bring luck. I think they are terrible."

Elisa, whose impressionable and superstitious spirit was well known to the maestra, grew pale.

"They were frightful, according to all ac-

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counts," went on the old woman, chuckling internally. "That they should be seen begging alms in the streets, that José may live to be obliged to steal to get food, and that at the end José may either hang on the gallows, or go out some day on the sea and not come back."

Elisa's hand trembled as she lifted her spoon to her mouth, while her mother, with refined cruelty, repeated one after another the horrors which the sacristana had prophesied for the future. At last tears began to fall from Elisa's beautiful eyes. On seeing these the maestra grew terribly indignant.

"What are you crying about, you silly thing? Was there ever in the world a bigger blockhead of a girl? Wait a minute and I will give you something to cry about."

And rising from her chair, she bestowed upon her a couple of angry slaps, that reddened the cheeks of the lovely girl.

While all these things were taking place, the bonito fishing was finished in Rodillero, or

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rather, it came to an end. During the latter days of October the weather was pleasant; the sea was lightly crumpled over all its surface by the passing of the chilly breezes of autumn. The sky at nightfall was hazy and pale; a few violet-colored clouds hung suspended in the horizon. The headlands of the coast seemed nearer in the purity of the atmosphere. When the squalls of wind, growing livelier, ran over the surface of the sea, it trembled as with cold, like a monster that feels goose-flesh rising.

The propitious season for sardine fishing had arrived; less fatiguing and less dangerous than that of the bonito. Unfortunately that year there were very few off the coast. The boats went out in the morning and came back at evening, and returned the great part of the days without bringing back in the baskets more than the value of the cod roe used for bait. How different that year from the one before, when they caught enough in an hour to satisfy them in returning home, when the gulls hovered in bands over the smacks to pick up scraps of

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booty, when the boys on shore climbing up on the cliffs saw the sardines shining in the bottoms of the boats like huge heaps of silver ingots!

And getting no sardines, neither had they bait to go out for conger-eels and cod, nor to fish in shore for perch, salmon and other delicate fish. Hunger would soon be present in Rodillero, for the fisherfolk usually live from hand to mouth, without looking to the future. Some of them, however, kept themselves from want by persisting in going out for bonito, although this resulted in very little either, and the fishing was already, on account of the lateness of the season, attended with grave risk.

The sea was at this period almost always in a state of disturbance; the wind also would come up suddenly and the boats had to separate in order to find any fish.

José was one of the most fearless of fishermen, but, conquered by the warnings of the old fishermen and those of his own experience, he made up his mind to stop going out for bonito, and gave himself to the sardine fishery, although

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with the least possible hopes of getting good results.

Before beginning this fishing he went by land to Sarrio one morning for the purpose of buying bait. The day had dawned peacefully ; the sea was a milky color ; the sun kept himself for a long time enveloped in a light white gauze ; and the headlands in a blue transparent mist. Above the vast expanse of the sea, the sky seemed fluted with clouds of mingled violet and rose. At ten in the morning the sun broke through its veil, dissipating the clouds, and it began to blow fresh from the northeast. At one o'clock in the afternoon the breeze fell, and there appeared over the land a few white cloudlets like flakes of wool ; there were signs of a sudden change.

In half an hour this had declared itself. The west wind went on gaining the victory over his enemy, and began to blow strongly, but not enough to inspire any alarm. Its force, however, was augmented little by little in such fashion that by three o'clock it was blowing a

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gale. From now on it grew momentarily into the dreaded south by west wind. The mariners who were in the village had all hastened to the shore; there was a loud agitated noise made by the rushing to and fro of people, and the questions that neighbors shouted to one another. The women left their household occupations and coming out through doors and casements and looking frightened at one another, asked each other with eyes and with tongue, "Have the boats got back?" "Are the boats coming in?" And one after another of those who had men on the sea directed their steps to the shore, joining in a little group, and expressing their fears. But before they could get there the wind loosed itself in such violence and wrath as had seldom been seen. In a few minutes it was transformed into a terrible and devastating hurricane, sweeping across the narrow defile of Rodillero with an infernal clamor, beating furiously at the doors of the houses, tearing away some of the nets that were found hanging from the windows and beating whirlwinds of dust

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into the eyes of the people. The women, breathless with fright, suspended all conversation and ran distracted on the beach; the rest of the inhabitants, men, women and children who had no relations on the sea, left their houses too and followed them. Nothing could be heard in the street but the cry, "The boats! the boats!"

As that multitude poured down on the waterfront, the sea offered a spectacle more beautiful than imposing. The sudden winds were not stirring up a great commotion on the seas for the moment, except a lively surface dashing. Over the vast plain, on all its infinite extent, white points surged up and disappeared like magic sparkles. But the old men fixed their eyes anxiously upon the horizon, not seeing any sign whatever of any bark.

There was heard a voice calling:

"Up to San Esteban, up to San Esteban!"

They all left the shore to go up to the mountain, which dominated an immense extent of water. The greater part of them hastened to

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seek it by running up the road that leads up behind the town. Most of the children, and the poor women who had husbands and brothers on the sea, began to climb straight up the declivity; impatience, terror and anxiety giving them strength to get up the sharp and rugged rocks.

When they reached the summit, and looked out upon the great field of the ocean, they saw on the far confine of the horizon three or four white points; these were the boats. Later others appeared in succession, one after another, constantly showing more clearly.

“They are all fetching back to land under foresail only,” said one of the seamen, who had just arrived.

“Back to land, yes; but they are going to seek shelter at the nearest point on the coast! they are headed almost towards Peñacosa,” replied another.

The group of spectators gathered on the mountain top was speedily enlarged by those who kept on arriving. The wind twirled with

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living force at the women's kerchiefs, and obliged the men who had worn their hats to take them in their hand and stand to the weather.

An anxious silence reigned in that handful of human beings; the hurricane roared with all its fury about their ears, almost stunning and deafening them. All eyes were fastened upon those white points that seemed motionless there upon the horizon. From time to time the seamen made some quick observation to each other.

"The flying spray must bother them."

"Phew! that's of little importance. Just now the sea isn't doing them any worse harm than that. If they get ashore, they will not care."

"They have to luff a good deal."

"That's plain; all they can in this wind; and yet even so, I don't know how they are going to be able to get under lee of the headland."

The boats at last were lost to sight, one be-

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hind another, where the seamen had said they would go.

The group breathed again, yet that comfort was changed little by little to heartache in proportion as time advanced, and the smacks did not appear round the point of land nearest Rodillero, called the Cuerno.

Half an hour went by; the group of people kept their eyes fixed on the headland with an expression of anxiety; the wind blew harder and harder.

"They are very slow," said one seaman in the ear of another.

"They have perhaps put in to the harbor of Peñacosa," replied that one.

"Or got under the lee of the land without making a landing."

The first speaker was right. After waiting a long time there appeared round Cuerno a boat under foresail only, and that but half hoisted.

"It's Nicholas de Tejera's," several voices said all at once.

"Praised be God! Blessed be the Holy Vir-

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gin! The dear Santo Cristo has saved them!" cried all together the wives and mothers of those who manned the craft, and they ran down to the shore again to wait for them.

After a little while another one appeared.

"It's Manuel de Dorotea's!" was then exclaimed in the group.

The same blessings and cries of joy were heard, and another crowd of women and children detached themselves and went down on the beach.

Then came another, and another, and thus in succession appeared the boats, one after another. The group on Mount San Esteban dwindled down little by little as fast as the craft entered the bay of Rodillero. Soon it was reduced to a handful of people. Only one boat was lacking. On the shore it was already known that one boat had not arrived because it had capsized; but nobody dared go up on San Esteban to notify them. The poor women who were there waited with their little ones by the hand, silent, immovable, feeling a presenti-

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ment of their sorrow, and striving to drive the terrible thought from their minds.

The sun had already gone down amid resplendent red clouds; the wind persisted in blowing furiously. The waters of the sea ceased rolling and began to rise, swelling gloriously. The wives and mothers went on gazing fixedly at the sea, hoping ever to see their own coming. Nobody uttered a word either of fear or consolation; but, unknown to themselves, tears began to fall from their eyes; the wind quickly dried them on their faces.

While this was happening in Rodillero, José was swiftly making his homeward way along the Sarrio highroad. As an experienced seaman, he understood at the first change of the wind that there was going to be a dangerous blow. As he noted the unusual violence of the gusts, he said to himself, full of sadness:

“It is impossible that to-day shall pass without sorrow in Rodillero.”

And he hastened his steps the more. From time to time he paused a few minutes to climb

JOSÉ

up on some height by the road, and carefully scrutinize the sea-line in search of the boats. When the hurricane reached its greatest power, he could no longer stay his impatience; he left the keg of bait that he had bought for the hands of any passer-by who might chance to find it, and began running like a deer until he was almost out of breath.

When he reached the first houses of the village, it was already almost dark. A group of little boys were playing ball in front of the houses. As he passed one of them said, "José, Tomas's boat is lost."

The seaman stopped and asked, visibly moved:

"Was my brother-in-law, Nicasio, aboard?"

The boy bowed his head without replying, frightened and sorry for what he had said.

José turned terribly pale, took off his cap and ran his hand over his brow and through his hair, groaning and muttering words of woe.

He went on walking into the village followed by the group of boys and many others.

JOSÉ

"There goes José; there goes the widow's José," said the folks, coming to the doors and windows to see him pass, pallid, his cap in his hand. As he crossed in front of the tavern three or four voices issued, calling to him; and as many more seamen hastened out to stop him and make him come in. Bernardo was one of these, another was Corsario.

"Make haste and tell me how Tomas's boat was lost. Was nobody saved?" he asked with trembling voice as he stepped foot in the tavern.

None of the seamen could at once answer him. After a few moments of silence, one of them said to him:

"Come, José, take a glass of wine and compose yourself. We are likely to have the same thing happen to us."

José dropped overcome upon the bench nearest the bar; and put his head in his hands without taking any notice of the glass that his companion put before him. After a while, however, he put out his hand, seized it, and drank the wine thirstily.

JOSÉ

“What can be done! It is all as God wills!” said one who was leaning against the bar. Wiping with his cap the tears that rolled down his face, José asked in a stifled voice:

“How did it happen?”

“Nobody can tell, lad; it went to the bottom because it was its doom,” answered one. “When we were all coming in with the foresail half up, and with every eye looking sharp, and when we were fairly beside ourselves, we saw that Tomas’s foremast was capsizing, his mast half over. It seemed to me as if he had not succeeded in stirring at all, when *Zas!* the boat gave a turn over—”

“Did nobody float?” asked José.

“Yes; three or four.”

“And why didn’t you pick them up?”

“Because we were at such distance from them; Joaquin de la Mota was between us and them, and we were much further off in the wind. We thought he would pick them up.”

“You thought! You thought!” exclaimed

JOSÉ

Bernardo indignantly, "What I think is that you ought every one of you to be marched to jail by the *guardias civiles*."

"What for! Lubber! What for?" demanded the other, full of wrath. "What could we do, passing more than a gun-shot off from them? Do you want us to save them and founder ourselves?"

"Founder! Founder! It is a pity you didn't! Why didn't you have down your bit of sail, and make haste to row to them?"

"Hush up, ass, hush! Do you suppose that we could make the sea smooth at will?"

"The sea was beautiful, a little stirred up, nothing more."

"What do you know about what is going on at sea when you are on land stuffing your belly?"

"The sea was beautiful, I tell you! And, besides, as a last resort, why not cast anchor and give a little time to those who were trying to get up with you?"

While Bernardo and the other seamen were

JOSÉ

disputing, José remained silent, holding his head between his hands in an attitude of profound dejection. He was thinking that his sister had six children, the eldest eleven years old, without any property under the sun; and, too, his sisters had never cared for him, although his heart had dedicated to them an immense affection. The fat, lymphatic landlord pitied him, and made efforts to console him, taking him from time to time another glass full of wine. He stretched out his arm absently and drained it to the bottom without exactly knowing what he was doing.

When the dispute between Bernado and his companion was growing hot, there were heard loud cries in the street, and almost in the same moment the sister of our seaman came noisily into the tavern, the one who had just become a widow, bareheaded, and with altered countenance, followed by her children. She rushed to José, and cast herself into his arms, breaking out into agonizing sobs that made the seamen grave and silent. He who held her also began

JOSÉ

to weep. When they moved apart the woman gathered her children together and, pushing them towards José, told them with a sort of theatrical expression that shocked the bystanders, who understood very well all that he had suffered for her sake, "My children, you have now no one to support you. Go down on your knees to your uncle, and beg him to be a father to you; he who is so good will protect you."

The noble fellow did not perceive, as the others did, his sister's hypocrisy. He embraced the children and kissed them, saying, "Have no fears, poor little ones. As long as I have a crust of bread it will be yours and your mother's."

Then he wiped away his tears, and said to his sister:

"Come, take them home now; it is getting late."

When the woman and her children had left the tavern the dispute began raging anew over the accident of the afternoon. Little by little

JOSÉ

all the seamen took part on one side or the other until nobody could understand a word.

José remained silent beside the bar, draining from time to time the glass that the landlord offered him. At last, without knowing how much he had been drinking, he lost consciousness and had to be carried home in a state of complete intoxication.

IX

José took the widow and her children home, and maintained them in all the comfort possible to his limited resources. But these instead of increasing were diminished. The sardine fishing was unlucky to the end; there were scarcely any congers or cod. When the bream came, in the months of December and January, José was more than a thousand reals in debt, and still owed for four barrels of bait, which brought it up to a large amount. Followed up by his creditors, he parted with his boat, the old one, which, sold in haste, brought but little money. And having now no boat of his own he found no help for it but to go in another man's, where he worked for wages that this year were very low.

His troubles were aggravated by having no comfort at home. His mother did not endure the reverses of fortune patiently, and rebelled

JOSÉ

against them, arousing on the slightest pretence for a battle that could be heard in every corner of the village. At home, her daughter, her grandchildren, and José himself, when he got in from the sea, were victims of that temper which choked her and wore upon her visibly. For another thing, the married sister did not look favorably on the widow and her children eating up everything there was in her mother's house and leaving her destitute; she never even got a wretched straw pallet out of the house (such were her words), and she did not refrain from throwing it in her mother's face whenever she could. And so there grew disgusting quarrels that converted the dwelling into a veritable inferno.

To get out of it temporarily, and not die of wretchedness, our unhappy seaman went from time to time to the tavern, and passed a few hours there, chatting and drinking with his companions. Little by little the vice of drunkenness, that he had so much abhorred, took possession of him; and if it did not dominate

JOSÉ

him entirely as it did others, making him forget his obligations, there were in town, none the less, enough who said to themselves that he had turned into a drunkard. Isabel promptly published this idea among his comrades.

Poverty, toil, domestic discord, would not have been potent to quench the courage of the fisherman, if to these had not been added the loneliness of his heart that he now suffered within in silence.

Trained in trouble, having endured from his birth all the severities of ill-fortune, struggling with the fierceness of the sea and with the characters, no less fierce, of his mother and sisters, one more lashing of destiny mattered little to him if his life had not been illuminated for an instant by the sun of happiness.

But he had stumbled upon love in his monotonous existence, and he had stumbled at the same time on that which had also brought him material success. Soon luck and love had fled from him; the ray of light was put out; he remained subject to the darkness of misery and

JOSÉ

loneliness. And as it is true, as the poet affirms, that there exists no greater sorrow than remembering in trouble a happier time, it is no wonder that poor José sought a reprieve for his own, and a momentary forgetfulness of his pain, in the fictitious happiness that wine gives.

After the quarrel of his mother with Isabel, he had not returned to speak with Elisa, nor had he seen her except at a distance. When he saw her face (and it was seldom, as he passed all his days on the sea) he hastened to take himself off or mingled with a group so as not to encounter her, or sought refuge in the nearest tavern. At first this was in shame and fear; he was afraid that Elisa was offended and would not care to speak to him. Later on gossip, which in such cases never fails to get about quickly, brought to his ears the news that the young girl was already inclined to disprize him; that her mother had succeeded in persuading her, and that she was soon to be married to a pilot from Sarrio. Then for sake of dignity, he carefully avoided a meeting. The disappoint-

JOSÉ

ments that he had suffered helped him much in separating himself from her. He thought, and he did not lack reason for it, that a ruined man with as many obligations as he could carry, was not a good match for any girl, and least of all for one so much sought after as the maestra's daughter.

Things were going on thus when one day, as there was no breeze, he did not go out upon the sea. He proposed to his mother that they should go to Peñacosa, distant more than half a league from Rodillero, where Teresa had a sister who had offered him potatoes from her garden and some other vegetables which, in the state of poverty in which he found himself, would be a very acceptable aid. They decided to go in the evening, and return in the dark, so that José might not be seen with his burden in daylight in the town. Although there was a government road to Peñacosa, the people of that village and of Rodillero were accustomed, when they had no horse or wagon, to make use of a path that followed the shore of the sea; this was the one

JOSÉ

that mother and son followed when the sun had already gone down.

It was a fresh clear day in the month of February; the sea was of a dark, deep blue. When the path would not permit them to walk side by side, the mother went on ahead, and the son followed her; they walked sadly and silently. By this time joy had deserted their hearts. When they found themselves nearly half-way, at a place where the way left the cliff of the coast and entered a wide pleasant field, they saw in the distance two or three persons who were coming towards them. Teresa paid no attention to them; but José, from his habit of observing at long distances, was not long in discovering that those persons were Isabel and her daughter. He felt a leaping of the heart, thinking that he was obliged to meet them. He could not get up confidence to speak to his mother; but let her walk on abstractedly, with eyes cast down. At last she lifted her head, and fixing her eyes upon the two distant figures, she turned towards him, and asked:

JOSÉ

“Look, José, don’t those two women look to you to be the seña Isabel and Elisa?”

“I believe so,” responded the seaman dully.

“Ah!” exclaimed Teresa, with fierce satisfaction, hastening her steps a little without uttering a word, fearing doubtless that her son would try to hinder the plan that had suddenly been born in her imagination.

José followed her with an anguished heart, not daring to say anything; yet after they had gone on a few steps, he had more fear of a violent scene and scandal than filial awe, and he ventured to say sternly:

“Mother, do me the favor, for God’s sake, not to compromise yourself, and not to compromise me.”

But Teresa had gone on her way without answering, as if she wished to avoid argument.

A little further on, he said still more sternly:

“Look out what you do, mother!”

Still the same silence on the part of Teresa.

Meanwhile those who were going and those

JOSÉ

who were coming from Peñacosa had approached sufficiently near. When she found herself within a stone's throw, Isabel halted, and vacillated a moment between coming on and going back, because she perceived the non-pacific expression with which Teresa was making her way towards her. At last she adopted the middle course of standing still. Teresa advanced rapidly upon her ; but, on finding herself at a distance of twenty or thirty steps she paused also, and, putting her arms akimbo, began to question her enemy in the sarcastic tone that anger always made her adopt:

“Hola, señora ! How do you do, señora? Are you well? Husband well, too? It is a long time that I have not had the pleasure of seeing you.”

“José, take good care of your mother; she is crazy,” growled Isabel, with twitching face.

“Ah señora! since when has he been reduced to asking alms!” and suddenly, exchanging the ironical expression of her face for one of wrath and ferocity, Teresa sprang across the distance

JOSÉ

that separated her from her enemy, and threw herself upon her, shrieking:

“You have driven me crazy, *bribona*. But now you are going to pay up for everything!”

The struggle was as mad as it was disgusting. The widow, stronger and with better nerve, at once threw Isabel down on the ground; but she, calling upon her every means of defence, tore out her enemy's earrings, splitting her ears and making them bleed copiously.

José on one side, and Elisa on the other, precipitated themselves on their mothers to separate them, and kept on trying uselessly to do so. Elisa's face was bathed with tears. José was pale and agitated. Their hands met accidentally in one of the chances of their task. By a simultaneous movement, both lifted their heads, they looked at each other with love, and their hands clung tenderly together.

At last José, getting his mother by the waist, lifted her bodily, carried her off a few steps and put her down. Elisa aided him as he helped

JOSÉ

her own to rise. They parted, and all went on their ways.

The mothers went muttering on ahead ; their children followed turning their heads half around to look until they were quite lost to each other's sight.

X

DON FERNANDO of the noble house of Meira was spending an evening, two months after the events that we have just referred to, in the great salon of his ancestral mansion. One would have given little heed at that time to the artistic old bronze lamp, in harmony with the splendid amplitude of space, or the modern and elegant silver candelabra of a more recent period, because the mosaic floor was not free, clear and open as in old times. It showed holes here and there that, however much worn by the soles of the señors de Meira, and therefore very worthy of veneration, were none the less avowed enemies to the integrity and safety of the stones, the same as if the hidalgos had been plebeians.

Don Fernando knew them very well without seeing them, as he walked with rapid step from one end to the other of the apartment, amid the shadows.

JOSÉ

His footsteps resounded hollow and deep through the ancient habitation; but the mice, accustomed to hear them, showed no fear whatever, and tranquilly persisted in their work of devastation, breaking the silence of night with a light continual crunching. The bats, with even less timidity, flew about in a fantastic whirl above the head of the old man, with a fearful deafening whirr.

In that moment Don Fernando would perhaps willingly have been metamorphosed into a mouse or perhaps into a bat. However unpleasant it might be to gnaw in wood, sepulchered in a gloomy hole, or to lie in a stupor during the day over the cornice of a door, only to fly about in the melancholy hours, it would not at least be to see himself deprived of the light of the sun and of being able to go out into the free air, after having known the sweetness of one and the other. For this, neither more nor less, was what had befallen the noble inheritor of the house of Meira for nearly one month. And why was this? For

JOSÉ

one thing very simple and plain, he had no shirt.

It had been long enough that Don Fernando had had only one; but with that one he had contrived to get along. When it was soiled, he had washed it with his own hands, and hung it out in a little court which was behind the house; and after it was dry, having ironed it well with his own hands, had put it on. But there came a morning when the shirt hung in the sun, and the Señor de Meira was waiting in his mansion for it to dry, that a neighbor's donkey chanced to find his way into the court through one of the many breaches in its walls. The Señor de Meira saw him approach the shirt, without suspecting any ill. He saw him stick his nose against it without comprehending his plans. It was only when he beheld it between the teeth of the young ass that he realized his lack of foresight, and felt his heart torn in two and his shirt also. Since then Don Fernando had not been able to set foot in the street during the hours of daylight. It would have much dis-

JOSÉ

tressed, and not without reason, his elevated feudal sentiments to present himself without such an indispensable article of dress before the sons of those old-time villagers over whom his forefathers had exercised the right of kicking, and other privileges quite as despotic if less painful.

Among the sons of those villagers the rumor ran that it was very certain that Don Fernando was getting to the last pass. And however hunger might hover like a hungry eagle over the head of almost all the folk of Rodillero, there were not lacking pitying hearts that managed to take help to the noble gentleman without wounding his extraordinary and most delicate susceptibility. He who distinguished himself most in this generous task was our José, who resorted to a thousand stratagems and tricks to oblige the Señor de Meira to accept his aid. Once he went and told him of an old debt that his mother owed the house of Meira. Very often he sent fish for his good cheer; at other times he carried food in a basket, saying he had come to sup with him and enjoy his company.

JOSÉ

Don Fernando, who knew the precarious situation of the mariner, heroically repelled this much-needed succor, and it was only after long striving that José succeeded in making him accept it, turning away his head not to see the tears of gratitude that the old gentleman was unable to restrain.

But sometimes this and other help was not enough; there were days when nobody appeared in the melancholy mansion; and then it was that Don Fernando passed through "the woes of Cain," according to the public voice referred to.

These were now more terrible and cruel than ever. There had been twenty-four hours that no nourishment whatever had entered the stomach of the noble caballero, and as nearly as he was able to calculate, it would be several more before any could enter, since it was ten o'clock at night, and all the neighbors must have gone to bed. In proportion as time passed his pangs increased; his footsteps were not so energetic; from time to time he passed

JOSÉ

his hand across his brow where had started some drops of cold sweat, and he let a number of sighs escape him, which died away sadly without filling all the space of the shadowy salon. The last heir of the high and honorable name of Meira was on the point of swooning with hunger. Soon, without giving exact account to himself of what he was doing, moved doubtless by a pure instinct of self-preservation, he suddenly quitted the apartment, went down the ruined staircase with a few leaps and flung himself into the street. Once in it he stood immovable, without knowing which way to go.

It was a mild dark night of springtime; thick rain-clouds veiled completely the refulgence of the stars. Don Fernando glanced about him one way and then the other with a dolorous expression of anguish; and then, after hesitating some moments, began to walk slowly for some distance along the street in the direction of the outlet of the village. As he passed before the houses, he hesitated, wondering if he should call out and ask for succor, but a lively sense

JOSÉ

of shame took possession of him at the moment that he approached the doors, and he went on his way, ever onward, thoroughly convinced, none the less, that he should soon fall down, overcome by misery. He began to feel dizzy and noted that his head whirled. Arriving in front of the house of the seña Isabel, which was one of the last in the place, he halted. Where was he going? To die perhaps like a dog on the solitary road. Then turning to look about him he saw on his left the white walls of the maestra's garden ; it was a large fertile garden, full of fruits and vegetables, the best there was in the village, or rather the only good one. The criminal thought of entering that garden and getting possession of a few vegetables assaulted the good hidalgo. He recoiled from it instantly ; it tempted him again. He turned from it and drove it away. Finally after a tenacious struggle, Don Fernando said to himself, to give a decent appearance to his project of robbery :

“What, then, I see I am going to let myself

JOSÉ

die of hunger? A few potatoes more or less are nothing to the maestra. She has plenty, squeezed out of the poor fishermen!"

And thus it was that hunger in a moment made a socialist of the last heir of the great house of Meira.

He went along the length of the wall, doubled to the left, and sought in the rear of the house for the most accessible place to enter. The wall in that part was not so high and was crumbling down in several places. Don Fernando put his feet in the holes and succeeded in getting them up on top of the enclosing wall. Once there he grasped the boughs of an apple tree, and descended by means of them slowly, and with much caution, to the ground. After having stood immovable for some moments in order to make sure that nobody heard him, he pushed on into the garden. The first thing that he did when he found himself among the vegetable beds was to pull up an onion, and get his teeth into it. When he had swallowed it, he pulled up three or four more, and put

JOSÉ

them into his pockets ; then he turned again with stealthy wolf-like step towards the wall. But, before arriving at it, he perceived with terror that the boughs of the apple tree from which he had jumped were moving, and in the dim light of the night, he perceived that it was a man that was stirring among them, and that he let himself drop to the ground, as he had done. Don Fernando stood petrified, and his fear and shame increased mightily when the man gave several steps into the garden and came towards him. The first thing that occurred to him was to drop upon the ground. The man passed, brushing against him. It was José.

“Has he also come to steal?” thought Don Fernando ; but from José’s mouth issued a prolonged whistle, the Señor de Meira perceived that this had to do with a lovers’ meeting, a thing which surprised him greatly ; for he had believed, like all the village, that the engagement between Elisa and the seaman had been broken off for a long time.

Another form was not slow in appearing be-

JOSÉ

side the house, and the lovers approached each other and began to talk in a voice so low that Don Fernando could not hear more than the lowest whispering.

The situation of the caballero was a little false ; if the young people should propose a stroll about the garden or should be there when daylight came and see him, what shame ! To avoid this peril he moved slowly and softly towards the apple tree and hid himself among the bushes that were near it, hoping José would depart by climbing the tree again, and take himself away home. But when he had watched them a little while a few drops of rain began to fall, and the lovers came too, to take refuge under the apple tree, which was one of those in the garden, low, thick and leafy, with spreading top and furthest from the house. Don Fernando believed himself lost, and began to sweat with fear ; he did not stir a finger. Elisa and José sat down upon the ground side by side, and turned their backs towards the caballero, without suspecting his presence.

JOSÉ

"And why do you think your mother suspects something?" said José, in a low voice.

"I don't know how to explain it to you; but for some days past she has looked at me a good deal, and never leaves me alone for an instant. The other day while I was sweeping the parlor I began to sing. She came up immediately and said to me, 'It seems that you are very happy, Elisa; it has been a long time since I have heard a sound out of you.' She spoke to me in such a way and with such a mocking smile that I felt myself blushing, and I hushed my singing."

"Bah, those are only your notions," replied the seaman.

He kept silence, however, after this exclamation, and after a while broke it by saying:

"But it is well to use precautions. Take care, don't let her surprise you!"

"I should be in disgrace then. It would be better for me never to have been born," replied the girl in a frightened tone.

Both of them lapsed into silence. Elisa, thoughtful and abstracted, played with the

JOSÉ

grasses that she pulled from the ground. José put out his hand timidly and pretending to play with the grasses, began to stroke his sweetheart's fingers gently. The rain, which had increased a little, commenced to beat upon the leaves of the apple-tree with a melancholy monotonous patter; the garden already exhaled the penetrating odor of damp earth.

"Do you think you'll go out on the sea to-morrow?" Elisa asked after a while, lifting her beautiful great eyes towards the seaman.

"I doubt it," he replied; "What's the use?" he added bitterly. "In the last eight days we have only caught five duros' worth."

"I know it, I know it. This year there are no cod in the sea."

Again they remained silent. Elisa went on playing with the little grasses. The seaman had imprisoned one of her fingers with his own, and pressed it gently, without daring to possess himself of her hand. After a while Elisa, without lifting her head, began to say in a low, trembling voice:

JOSÉ

"I believe, José, that the cause of all that has happened to us is the curse that the sacristana uttered. Why don't you have her up for it? Since the woman cursed you, nothing has turned out well."

"Nor before either," added José, with a melancholy smile.

"She has done it to a good many others before you," the girl went on saying, without paying attention to the remark of her lover. "Look, you know how it was with Pedro of Matiella, so feeble and yellow; he was a pitiful object until he asked pardon of the sacristana."

"You mustn't believe in that witchcraft, Elisa," said the seaman, with an inflection in his voice wherefrom one might have guessed that he came very near to believing in it also himself.

Elisa, without answering, seized his arm firmly with a movement of terror.

"What's that I heard?"

"What?"

"There among the bushes."

JOSÉ

"I did n't hear anything."

"It seemed to me like somebody breathing."

Both kept perfectly still, listening intently.

"How timid you are, Elisa," said the seaman laughing. "It is the sound of the rain falling through the leaves to the ground."

"It seems so to me," replied the girl, without taking her eyes off the bramble-bush where Señor de Meira was hidden, and relaxing little by little her hold upon her betrothed's arm.

While this was going on, the concealed one was perspiring in fear that José would come and explore the bushes. Fortunately this was not done. Elisa soon grew quiet; and seeing her lover thoughtful and depressed changed her conversation with the idea of cheering him.

"When do you begin to go out for bonito again? I have already begun to wish that the season would open. My heart tells me that it is going to be a very good one."

"We shall see," replied José, shaking his head doubtfully. "I think we shall begin to

JOSÉ

go out in fifteen or twenty days. What are we going to do if we don't?"

"It will begin early, and after that come the festivals. What fun! That of la Luz comes a month from to-morrow," said Elisa, forcing herself to appear merry.

"What does it matter when the *romerías* begin if I can't go to them with you?" exclaimed the seaman in sorrowful tones.

"Don't let yourself be downed, José! Everything is going to turn out all right. There is nothing to do but trust in God, and every day beg of the Holy Christ that he will give you good luck, and will touch the heart of my mother."

"It is hard, Elisa; it is very hard. If she did not like me when I had a little cash, how is she going to care for me now when I am poor and have a larger family than most men?"

Elisa understood the justice of this remark, but replied with the sublime tenacity that love gives women:

"It's no matter. I believe she will relent.

JOSÉ

We must have confidence in the Santo Cristo of Rodillero, who has known how to work other and greater miracles.”

The rain began to fall very fast, in such a way that the tree was no longer enough to protect the lovers; the leaves, weighed down by the weight of water, let it fall in profusion upon their heads. But they did not notice it, entirely wrapped up in the delight of being together, their hands enlaced, their eyes gazing ecstatically at each other.

Elisa succeeded at last in banishing the melancholy of her lover; their conversation took a gayer turn; they talked over past festivals, and laughed merrily over their recollections.

“Do you remember when Nicholas invited us to the romeria of San Pedro? You said to me in an undertone, ‘We must drink all the wine that we can.’”

“Because I saw very soon that the great rascal did not care to play the generous, unless he could get out of it cheap.”

“It was as much as I could do to finish my

JOSÉ

glass, but you drank yours before I could say Lord ! and I declare Ramona didn't do at all badly either ! ”

“ When I saw Bernardo was going to swallow everything, I put a stop to him, didn't I ? ”

“ Well, the poor thing was no longer able to resist,” said Elisa, laughing. “ The best of all was when he said to get out of the trick, ‘ It is a joke ; and I don't care for jokes.’ When I remember the face that the wretched fellow made on seeing his glass disappear, I laugh like mad, even if I am all alone.”

Both of them laughed, indeed, but taking care to make no noise. “ One thing is certain,” went on Elisa, pretending to be solemn, “ that later you got a little bit happy, and you gave my cousin Ramona a kiss.”

“ I don't remember it.”

“ You did ! You remember only what you wish to.”

“ At all events, if a fellow is half seas over, he doesn't know what he is doing.”

JOSÉ

"You would know what was happening to you though, if you fell into the water."

"Of course."

"But when it happens that you kiss the girls?"

"I never do when I'm sober," declared José vehemently.

"My goodness! I hope in my last hours I shall be attended by as many angels as the kisses you have given."

"You are going to heaven all alone then," returned the seaman laughing.

Their conversation turned into a joyous dispute; the lovers intoxicated themselves with that sort of talk, finding everything that they said to each other very funny, and not ceasing their laughter, whose noise they quenched by putting their hands over their mouths. The dark rainy night was lovely to them.

But Elisa again thought she heard the breathing that had before alarmed her. She remained quiet a few moments, and not wishing to say anything to José that would make him un-

JOSÉ

happy again, she proposed that they should separate.

“It must already be very late, José,” she said, rising, “I have to get up early to-morrow; and besides we are getting sopping wet.”

The seaman rose too, although unwillingly.

“How quickly the time passes at your side, Elisa!” he said timidly.

The girl smiled sweetly on hearing this declaration, that the seaman had not dared utter until then, and flushing a little, she held out her hand saying:

“*Hasta mañana, José.*”

José took that hand, pressed it long and tenderly, and answered mournfully:

“Good-bye until to-morrow.”

She drew it away then, and hastened rapidly in the direction of the house. The seaman did not move until he felt sure she was within, then he cautiously climbed the wall, jumped over it, and disappeared on the other side.

Some minutes later Señor de Meira came

JOSÉ

out of his hiding-place, soaked through and through.

“Poor children!” he exclaimed, without remembering his own troubles, and climbed with some difficulty into the apple-tree. And, again in the street, he hastened his steps to his feudal mansion, turning over in his mind a project as noble as it was singular.

XI

A FEW days later Don Fernando presented himself at José's house very early in the morning before he had gone out on the sea.

"José, I must speak with you alone. Come out and take a walk with me."

The seaman thought that it was to ask for help, although he had not before then asked for anything outright. Only when hunger had brought him to it, would he say to him:

"José, they don't send bread now from Sinforosa, and I don't care to take of the other baker. Do me the favor to lend me a loaf."

But in order to arrive at this the caballero must needs be nearly exhausted; in no other way, directly or indirectly, would he humiliate himself to beg of anybody. José did think this, however, because it was not easy to think anything else, and taking a handful of coin and putting it in his pocket, he started out

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into the street in the company of the old gentleman.

Don Fernando led the way out of the village, and when they were at some distance, almost to the long sandy beach, he broke the silence, saying:

“Let me see, José, you must be somewhat short of money, aren’t you?”

José thought that this confirmed what he had imagined, but he was a little surprised at the tone of protection with which the hidalgo asked the question.

“Oh, so, so, Don Fernando, I am not very flush; but, of course, while one is young and able to work, there is not going to be any lack for a bit of bread.”

“A bit of bread is little. Man does not live by bread alone,” declared the Señor de Meira, sententiously; and, after walking a few steps in silence, he stopped suddenly and facing the seaman, asked him:

“You would be glad to be married to Elisa, would n’t you?”

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José paused, surprised and embarrassed.

"I? I haven't anything to do with Elisa now."

"I know you are telling me a falsehood, because you are in love with Elisa. You can't deny it to me," declared the caballero firmly.

José gazed at him amazed, and began to stammer out another denial, when Don Fernando stopped him, saying:

"Don't bother to deny it, but tell me frankly if you would not like to get married."

"Indeed I should," the seaman murmured, then dropping his head.

"Then marry!" said the Señor de Meira in his proudest tones, extending his hands before him.

José lifted his head quickly and looked at him, thinking that he must have gone mad, then dropping it once more he said:

"It is impossible, Don Fernando; we cannot think of it."

"For the house of Meira there is nothing

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impossible," responded the caballero with much more solemnity.

José shook his head, daring to doubt the power of the illustrious house.

"There is nothing impossible," repeated Don Fernando, casting a lofty glance upon him, worthy of a warrior of the Moorish conquest.

José feigned a smile.

"Listen a little," went on the caballero. "In the last century one of my ancestors, Don Alvero de Meira was magistrate of Oviedo. There was a house belonging to the clergy, who meddled a good deal in public affairs, and the corregidor made up his mind to have it pulled down. He met with opposition from the bishop and the chapter of the cathedral, who forbade him to carry out his intention on any account, under pain of excommunication; but the corregidor, on a certain day, taking no notice of their threats, ordered a gang of masons to the house and began to pull it down. That stirred up the bishop and made his lordship convoke the chapter and decide that they

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would put on their clerical robes and excommunicate every single man who dared to touch it; but my great-grandfather heard of it, and what did he do then? He went and ordered a notice put up on the wall, imposing a penalty of one hundred lashes for any mason who went under that roof. And not one of them went under it, boy. And the house came down!"

Don Fernando demolished ecclesiastical authority with an energetic movement of his hand; yet José appeared to be entirely insensible to this prowess of the de Meiras; he continued depressed and sorrowful, thinking what a pity it was that the power of dealing out lashes had not remained a perquisite of all the señors of the house of Meira, in which case he could have begged a few for the seña Isabel.

"When a de Meira takes anything into his head," went on the hidalgo, "then stand from under! Take this," he added, drawing a packet from his pocket, and offering it to José. "Here are ten thousand reals. Buy a new boat, and leave the rest to me."

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The mariner stood dumbfounded, and dared not put out his hand, thinking that this was the form Señor de Meira's madness had taken ; he had suspected before that he was not quite in his right mind.

"Take it, I tell you. Buy a new boat, and go to work."

José took the packet, turned it over, and was still more amazed to see that it was of gold coin. Don Fernando, smiling haughtily, continued :

"We will speak of something else now. Tell me how old is Elisa."

"Twenty."

"Has she reached her twentieth birthday?"

"No, señor, I believe it comes next month."

"Exactly. Next month you may tell her what has been done. In the meantime, manage so that nobody suspects your love-affair. Much secrecy, much prudence !"

Don Fernando spoke with so much anxiety, and arched his eyebrows so excessively, that it gave weight to his slight, stooped personality,

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overwhelming the mariner with respect ; he almost arrived at believing in the mysterious and invincible power of the house of Meira.

“ One other thing. You can arrange to get the boat to-night ? ”

“ What boat ? My employer’s ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ To go somewhere ? ”

“ To take a row.”

“ If it is only for that.”

“ Then at midnight to-night come to my house ready to go out upon the sea. I must help you in a certain way, that I know. Now go home and begin to take steps towards the purchase of the boat. Go to Sarrio for it, or build it here, whichever seems best to you.”

Confused and immensely perplexed, our fisherman parted from the Señor de Meira. He did nothing but speculate as he walked homeward how so much money had got into the hands of the ruined hidalgo, and he said to himself that he would not make use of it until he had looked into the matter. But as riddles,

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especially money riddles, do not last the shortest possible time in small villages, two hours had not passed before he knew that Don Fernando had sold his house the day before to Don Anacleto, who wanted it to turn it into an *escabeche* factory; for no other purpose, people were sure, because it was really not fit to be lived in. Don Fernando had mortgaged it some time ago to a merchant in Peñacosa for nine thousand reals. Don Anacleto had paid this amount, and had given him fourteen thousand reals besides.

In view of this, José resolved to return the coin to the generous caballero as soon as he should see him again; because it seemed to him indecorous to accept, although in the form of a loan, money which was so much needed by its owner.

He was, however, interested in that mysterious night appointment, and awaited the hour impatiently to see what it meant. A little before the clock on the town hall struck twelve, he directed his steps towards the de Meira

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mansion, summoned him with a knock on the worm-eaten door ; and with little delay Don Fernando appeared in person.

“ You are punctual, José. Is the boat afloat ? ”

“ She must be ; yes, Señor.”

“ Very well. Come here and help me to carry this to her.”

Don Fernando revealed by the light of his candle a bulky bundle in a corner of the porch by the house, done up in sailcloth and tied with ropes.

“ It is very heavy ; I warn you.”

“ Indeed, in trying to move it, he saw that it was almost impossible to lift it up to his shoulder. José thought that it must be an iron box.

“ We shall not be able to get it up on our shoulders, Don Fernando. Would it not be better for us to drag it little by little down to the shore ? ”

“ Just as you think best.”

It was thus dragged away from the house. Don Fernando put out the candle, locked the

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door, and after repeated efforts and with no little labor it was got slowly down until it was near the boat. The Señor de Meira had grown taciturn and melancholy, nor opened his lips. José fell into his humor, but he felt at the same time enough curiosity to try to find out what that extremely heavy box contained.

It was necessary to place logs from the ground to the boat, and, thanks to them, they rolled the box along until they got it on board. They stepped in then, and with the greatest possible silence moved out from among the other craft.

The night was one of moonlight, clear and luminous: the sea sleeping and tranquil as a lake; the air mild as in summer.

José rowed two oars, against the wish of the hidalgo, who offered to take one; and, favored greatly by the tide, they were soon out from land.

The Señor de Meira went and sat down in the stern. Jose pulling rhythmically at his oars, observed him with interest. When they

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found themselves some two miles from Rodillero, after having doubled Cuerno point, Don Fernando stood up.

“Enough, José.”

The seaman rested on his oars.

“Help me to put this bundle into the water.”

José made haste to help him, but more and more desirous to probe that strange mystery, he ventured to ask smilingly :

“I suppose it isn’t money that you are throwing overboard, Don Fernando?”

He was stooping down, getting ready to lift the bundle, but he suspended operations, stood up and said :

“No, it is not money : it is something that is worth more than money. I forgot that you have the right to know what it is since you have done me the favor to accompany me.”

“I did not say it for that, Don Fernando ; it is nothing to me what it is.”

“Open it !”

“By no means, Don Fernando, I don’t want you to think —”

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“Open it, I tell you,” repeated the Señor de Meira in a tone that left no room for reply.

José obeyed, and after taking off the manifold wrappings of sailcloth that covered it, he discovered at last the object; it was nothing else but a piece of stone rudely carved.

“What is it?” he asked with surprise.

Don Fernando, in a hollow, weary voice, answered, “The escutcheon of the house of Meira.”

There was an embarrassed silence. José did not emerge from his amazement and stared at the caballero, expecting some explanation, but he made no haste to give it. With folded arms and head sunk upon his heart, he regarded without moving an eyelash the stone that the seaman had succeeded in uncovering. At last he said in a low and trembling voice:

“I have sold my house to Don Anacleto, because one of these days I shall die, and what does it matter whether it falls into strange hands before or after. But I sold it with the condition that I should take the escutcheon

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down from it. I have been working nights for some time past to get the stone from the wall. At last I succeeded in doing so."

As Don Fernando was quiet after uttering these words, José took occasion to inquire :

"And why do you throw it into the water?"

The old gentleman looked at him with indignant eyes : —

"Zambombo ! Should you like to see the escutcheon of the great house of Meira up on a fish-house?"

And soon calming himself, he added :

"Look at these arms ! Observe them carefully. Since the fifteenth century they have been placed above the door of the house of Meira. It is not the same stone, because as ours became connected with other houses it was necessary to change it, and put new quarterings on the escutcheon as others appeared. During the last century it was definitely fixed by the alliance of the Meiras and the Mirandas. There are five quarterings. The one in the centre is that of the Meiras. It is placed in what is called

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in heraldry the point of honor. Its arms are azure and a bend argent with golden dragons' heads, a bordure argent with eight *arminios* sable. You will ask," added Don Fernando, with his protecting smile, "Where are these colors? It is very natural that you should ask it, having no notion of heraldry. The colors on the stone are represented by means of conventional signs. Gold — look at this quartering — is represented by means of little points traced with a sharp burin; silver by a smooth even ground; blue by little horizontal rays; the gules, red, by perpendicular rays, and so forth, and so on. It is too much to explain. The Meiras were first united with the Viedmas, and here is their coat-of-arms on this first quartering of gules, a bridge argent with three arches, through which runs a full river, and a tower of gold ascendant in the middle of the bridge, the whole within a bordure argent seme with eight plain crosses azure. Afterwards they were allied with the Carrascos, and here at the left are their quarterings, divided into two

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equal parts ; The first argent, a lion rampant sable ; the second of gold and a tree verdant standing on a mound with a bird among the boughs, and a dog baying at the foot of the trunk. Neither the bird nor the dog show very well, because they have been worn away by the weather, but they are here. Later we were allied to the Angulos ; their quartering is of silver and five ravens sable volant. The ravens show quite clearly. At last we were united with the Mirandas, whose quarterings are a castle gold issuant from a gule, surmounted by a warrior with halberd naissant, accompanied by six roels vert and argent placed two on one side and one on the point. All the escutcheon, as you see, is crowned by a helmet of burnished steel with five bars."

The mariner understood nothing of the discourse of the Señor de Meira ; he gazed at him fixedly in astonishment. The sea rocked the boat gently.

"From the house of Meira," went on Don Fernando in an emphatic voice, "have come in

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every epoch brilliant sons, men of ability. It is well for you to know that in the fifteenth century Don Pedro de Meira was knight commander of the order of Santiago, and Don Francisco was a magistrate in Seville and deputy to the Cortes of Toro. You must know also that another son of the family was president of the council for Italy. He was called Don Rodrigo. Another named Don Diego was judge of the royal court of appeal, and afterwards president of that of Guadalajara. During the last century Don Alvaro de Meira was regidor of Oviedo and founded at Sarrio a collegiate church and a college for the learned professions and Latin; you must know that!"

José knew absolutely nothing of all this, but he nodded his head in assent to please the unhappy caballero, who now suddenly became silent, and remained so for a long while, until at last he began again, lowering his voice very much and speaking in sad tones.

"My eldest brother Pepe was a profligate, as you know well."

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This was indeed the only thing José knew about the family de Meira.

“He was ruined by a dancer. The little property that I had, he threatened to take from me if I would not give it to him, so that he could marry her. I, to save the honor of the house, made it over to him. Does it not seem to you that I did well?”

José assented once more.

“Since then, José, how much I have suffered! How much I have suffered!”

The hidalgo passed his hand across his forehead in his deep trouble.

“The great house of Meira dies with me, but it shall not die dishonored, Jose; I swear it to you!”

After he had made this oath, he became silent again and sat in an attitude of melancholy. The sea went on swaying the boat. The moon glistened in pale light upon the sea.

At the end of a long time, Don Fernando emerged from his meditation, and turning his eyes full of tears upon José, who looked at

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him sorrowfully, said to him, breathing forth a sigh :

“Come, let us go on. Take hold of the stone on this side ; I will take it by the other.”

Between them they succeeded in getting it upon the gunwale. Next Don Fernando gave it a strong push. The escutcheon of the house of Meira broke the surface of the water with a splash and buried itself in its dark bosom. The bitter drops that it sent spattering upward bathed the face of the old gentleman, mingling with his tears, no less bitter, shed in that instant.

He remained a few moments immovable, bent over the gunwale, looking at the place where the stone had disappeared. Rising then he said gloomily :

“Row ashore, José ;” and he went and sat down once more in the stern.

The mariner commenced to move his oars without speaking a word. Although he did not comprehend the grief of the hidalgo, and came near thinking like other folks that he

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was not right in his head, to see him weep filled him with profound pity, and he did not venture to disturb his sorrowful reverie.

But the idea of returning the money had not gone out of his head, because he saw clearly that such a favor, in the circumstances in which Don Fernando found himself, was a veritable madness; the desire to broach the subject boiled within him, but he did not know in what manner to begin. Three or four times he found a word on the end of his tongue, and as many more he stopped it, because it did not appear the suitable one. At last, when they were already near the land, he found no better plan for getting out of his difficulty than to draw out the ten thousand reals from his pocket, and offer them to the caballero, saying somewhat shamefacedly, "Don Fernando, you have not any too much money. I am very grateful to you for what you wished to do for me, but I ought not to take this cash when you need it —"

Don Fernando, with a gesture of disgust, and

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with flames of indignation shooting from his eyes, interrupted him growling :

“Coward ! Clown ! After I have done you the honor to confess my ruin to you, you insult me. Keep that money now, or I shall fling it into the water !”

José understood that there was nothing else to do, but to keep it ; and this he did, after having begged pardon for the supposed insult. He made up his mind, none the less, to see that Don Fernando lacked for nothing, and to return it to him at the first favorable opportunity. They sprang on shore and parted as good friends.

XII

José kept this all a secret, as he had been urgently begged to do by Don Fernando, who returned to his promise that the marriage with Elisa should come off exactly when he ordained that it should. He succeeded in making José believe that upon the secrecy with which he surrounded the subject hung all its success.

For the sum of six reals per day the good caballero found a boarding place, not suitable for the antiquity and nobility of his race, yet still sufficiently good to keep him from starvation, as it did not take much to satisfy him, as we already know. And (most unusual!) after he had a little money in his pocket, his pride of birth rose several degrees; he went about the village holding up his head, with firm, quiet footstep, bestowing upon his neighbors glances much more suited to the time of the Renaissance than to our own days; saluting the girls with a gal-

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lant and protecting smile, as if he still possessed the old-time right to order them about. Where he felt that occasion offered, he would drink the health of his vassals in a goblet of wine; and regale his feminine ones with confectionery. But it must be acknowledged, to be strictly truthful, that the villagers of Rodillero did not accept the favors of Don Fernando with that respect and submission with which their forefathers had in other times received the feudal lavishness of the grand house of Meira; it seemed rather that in draining the wine and taking the candy, they did it out of pure kindness, so as not to wound the delicate susceptibility of the hidalgo. And yet there was to be seen from all of them a certain smile of compassion, which, could they have seen it, would have made all the sons of that illustrious house turn over in their graves,—the knight commander of Villaplana, the deputy of the Cortes of Toro, the president of the Council of State, etc., etc. And as if this smile of compassion were not enough to tarnish the pres-

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tige of his lineage, the comments that were made behind the caballero's back were more humiliating still:—

“That poor Don Fernando imagines that fourteen thousand reals will never give out.”

“What would be better than for him to set up a little shop with this money, and get himself an income?”

“Not he. He will make away with it in a few days and then we shall see him coming to us to support him by alms.”

Elisa, one of the most beautiful feudal dependents that the Señor de Meira had in Rodilero, was in exactly the same proportion one of the most rebellious. In vain the noble señor exerted himself, promising her his protection whenever he met her by the way; in vain he often offered her a little box of almonds brought expressly for her from Sarrio. In vain he unfolded before her all the resources of the most refined gallantry of the good old times of the house of Austria. The lovely lass received this homage with a sweet and benevolent smile,

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wherein could be noted neither admiration nor awe ; and sometimes when the ceremonious bows and mellifluous phrases reached their height, there gleamed in her sad, soft eyes a slight expression of scorn. The truth is, nature had not seconded, little or much, the feudal disposition of Don Fernando ; on seeing him with his small, slight, stooping body before the tall, graceful figure of Elisa, the most benevolent imagination and one fondest of inventing would not have been able surely to fancy the señor of the castle before a timid village maid.

Two or three times he asked her suddenly, breaking the thread of his discreet classicisms :

“How old are you?”

“Twenty.”

The last time he said to her, “Have you your certificate of baptism?”

“I think so, señor.”

“Then bring it to me to-morrow, but take care nobody suspects anything. I have resolved that you and José shall be married in the shortest possible time.”

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On hearing these words, there was repeated on Elisa's lips that benevolent and compassionate smile of which we have made mention ; and on parting from the caballero, after a while spent in conversation, she did not fail to murmur, "Poor Don Fernando ! He is quite gone off."

Yet, on the advice of José, who had somewhat, although not much, pinned his faith to the power of the house of Meira, she carried him the document the day following. It would not be lost to her, and it would please the good señor. The young girl, who had no reason whatever to have faith in that power, like her betrothed, took the matter in jest.

That which made her every day much more serious was the malediction of the sacristana. In her candid soul superstition had always been rooted ; seeing now the implacable manner with which fortune persisted in disturbing her happiness, it was natural that she should ascribe it to an occult and mysterious power, which it was plain could not be other than the witch's ill-will. To undo or resist her

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power, Elisa frequently went to pray at vespers at the shrine of the most Holy Christ of Rodillero, that famous image that had been found at sea by some fishermen, centuries ago.

But it was in vain that within a short time she offered more than a dozen wax candles and recited more than a million paternosters; in vain also that she promised to spend a whole day at the shrine without tasting a mouthful, and then fulfilled it; the Santo Cristo either did not listen to her, or desired to experiment still more with her fortitude. The matter of her love affair grew worse daily. She thought of it quietly, and was able to say that all was lost. José was constantly worse lashed by ill-fortune; she was constantly more and more subject to her mother's heavy yoke, not daring to stir without permission, nor answer a word.

In this mournful situation she began to indulge the idea of making amends to the sacristana, and in this way overcome the unhappy influence that she had been enabled to hold over her life. The first thing that occurred to

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her was that José should beg her pardon, and she urgently advised him to do this several times ; but seeing that he resolutely refused to do this, and knowing his firm and decided character, she determined that she would humiliate herself.

One afternoon at the hour of the siesta, leaving the house quietly, she went out without being seen, and directed her steps up the rugged road that led to the sacristan's house, which was next the church, and both some distance from the village, on a plateau half way up the mountain. As she went along preoccupied and anxious, she did not see José's mother, who was cutting grass for her oven not far from the road. She lifted her head and said to herself in surprise, "Strange ! Where can Elisa be going at this time of day ?" She followed her with her eyes at first, and full of curiosity began walking along behind her so as not to lose sight of her. She saw that she stopped at the house of the sacristana, that she knocked and entered.

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“Ah, the tremendous little humbug,” she said in a cross voice, “to be hand in glove with the sacristana! It seems to me that with that hypocritical face you can’t be up to any good. I’ll settle you, my fine miss; I’ll settle you!”

Merely because Elisa had entered the house of the sacristana she must be hand in glove with her! This lack of logic had always characterized Teresa; bad temper entirely obfuscated the little judgment God had given her. She pretended to despise the curses of the sacristana, and her savage pride inspired her always to let herself go in insults whenever the woman was spoken of; but in reality there was no one in Rodillero who believed more firmly in such witcheries.

Eugenia came out to receive the young girl, and was greatly surprised to see her visitor; but on learning Elisa’s object showed herself very delighted and triumphant. Elisa explained herself, blushing and stammering. The sacristana, puffed up to an inexpressible degree, refused to condescend to give her pardon un-

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less Teresa and José should likewise come to beg it of her. In vain Elisa supplicated her with tears in her eyes ; in vain she threw herself at her feet, and with clasped hands begged for mercy ; nothing could accomplish her aim. The sacristana, enjoying her humility, and almost believing herself in the supernatural power that the simple fisher-folk had given her, only repeated in a haughty manner :

“ There can be no pardon while Teresa herself does not come to beg it of me on her knees, even as you are doing now.”

Elisa went away with her soul sorely agitated, understanding well that it would be impossible for her sweetheart's mother to do such a thing ; and seeing that the sacristana refused to lift her curse, she believed in its virtue more firmly than ever.

She went along with halting footstep, her eyes on the ground, meditating upon the ill-luck that had always attended her love-affair. Doubtless God did not approve of it, judging by the obstacles that had in so short a time

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been heaped before it. The road by which she descended was steep and rugged. At intervals there were places like a sort of landing.

On reaching one of these, she came unexpectedly upon Teresa. As, in spite of the estrangement between the two families, José's mother had not shown her any dislike, Elisa smiled in greeting, but Teresa came up to her and answered her salutation by a terrible slap on the face.

On finding herself thus unexpectedly maltreated, poor Elisa stood astonished, and, instead of defending herself, she put her hands to her eyes and broke into sobs of great anguish.

After her act of barbarity, Teresa remained waiting a little while, ashamed of herself; the humble and resigned attitude of Elisa surprised her; and to give a decent look to her indignity, or perchance to make haste and escape her remorse, she began to yell out impertinences against her victim, according to her custom.

"Go along, humbug, go and enjoy yourself again in the sacristana's society. Are

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you learning witchcraft of her? I will bring you a broomstick. Get out! Get out, with your hypocritical face! And why cut loose from home? I should not think it necessary to go out of your own home to be taught hag's tricks."

Teresa's baseless insults had such an effect upon the unhappy girl that, unable to resist her emotion, she fell fainting to the ground. This had the effect of entirely disconcerting the widow; and by an impulse of the heart, very natural in her violent temperament, she passed swiftly from anger to compassion, and running to hold Elisa up in her arms she began to murmur in her ear:

"Poor little thing! Poor little thing! Don't mind me, pigeon. I hurt you, didn't I? I am a crazy thing, my poor little one, to slap you, who are so good and so beautiful! What will my José say when he knows it!"

And seeing that Elisa did not come to herself, she began to tear her hair in despair.

"Beast, brute! There is n't another woman

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such a brute as I! Blessed Santo Cristo, come to my aid, and save this child! Elisa, Elisina, come to, for God's sake, dear heart!"

But the young girl was slow in coming out of her swoon. Teresa looked about in search of water to throw in her face. At last, not seeing any anywhere, and not daring to leave Elisa alone, she took her up in her robust arms and carried her over her shoulder to a fountain which was somewhat lower down. When she had sprinkled her temples with water, and she recovered consciousness, the widow hugged her and kissed her and begged her forgiveness; but these excessive caresses, instead of soothing Elisa, almost made her faint away again, they surprised her so much. At last, amid sobs and tears, she managed to say;

"*Muchas gracias*; you are very good."

"That being good!" Teresa broke forth with great vehemence, "I am a crazy pig: You are the good one, my little dove. Are you better? Did I hurt you very much? What will my José say when he knows it!"

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“ I went to the house of the sacristana to beg her to lift the curse.”

On hearing this Teresa again began to tear her hair :

“ Oh, but I’m a brute ; I am a madwoman. It would be but right to say that I ought to be locked up ! to beat this creature for doing me a kindness ! ”

It was necessary for Elisa to comfort her, and it was only after she had declared a number of times that she had not hurt her, and that she had got over her fright, and that she forgave her and liked her, that she succeeded in calming her.

By this time the young girl had got up from the ground. Teresa brushed her dress carefully, dried her tears with her apron, and embracing her and kissing her a great many times, she accompanied her along the church road, keeping her arm about Elisa’s waist. As they went they talked of José. Of what other subject could the two have talked with more enjoyment ? Elisa declared to Teresa that she

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would either marry her son, or nobody at all. Teresa showed herself highly pleased and flattered by this affection; they made each other mutual confidences and revelations, and promised each other to try with all their life and soul that the union might take place; and at last, on reaching the village, parted very affectionately. Teresa, still ashamed of what she had done, asked the young girl before they separated:

“You forgive me with all your heart, don’t you Elisa?”

“Bah,” she replied with a sweet and gracious smile, “if you beat me, it is because you have a right to do it. Am I not your daughter?”

Teresa embraced her anew, weeping.

XIII

THE foregoing event which might well have upset the concealed plans of the house of Meira concerning the fate of Elisa and José, seconded indeed their happy deliberations, because after this day there was established a firm friendship between Elisa and the mother of her betrothed, which they both necessarily kept dark, seeing each other stealthily, exchanging talk rapidly and giving each other messages from José and for José. His own interviews with the young girl continued taking place in the most silent hours of the night. The thought of all three was the wish to find means to realize the longed-for marriage against the will of the maestra, because they were well assured that nothing would succeed with her. Elisa understood very clearly that the cause of this harsh opposition was nothing else but avarice; the dislike of letting go of the property that had belonged

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to her dead husband, although she tried not to think so, and pushed such thoughts out of her mind; and yet she often promised herself that she would give up her estate if it came to the event, in order not to cause any annoyance to her mother.

But although such ideas were in her mind and in José's, they could not hit upon any way to take steps to realize them. The dullness of the poor seaman and the helpless ignorance of the women did not permit them to see a single ray of light on the subject. In this matter, as so many times during the middle ages, it was necessary for the castle to come to the rescue of the peasant. The house of Meira, without their suspecting it, much less any other person in Rodillero, worked in their interest with the mysterious and secret diplomacy which has always characterized grand lines, the Atridas, the Medicis and the house of Austria.

More than half a dozen times Don Fernando had gone to Sarrio, and had returned without anybody knowing the truth about the business

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that called him there; sometimes it was to buy fishing-tackle, at another it was to get some shoes, at another it was to see an invalid relative, etc.; always subtly deceiving the whole world, with a refinement truly Florentine.

All the same Teresa and Elisa did not fail to observe that the protecting mantle of the noble scion was over them; he gave them certain reasons for thinking so. When he crossed their path he directed glances of profound intelligence upon them, accompanied sometimes by certain inexplicable gestures. At other times he would utter some mysterious word like "Hope," "Friends are watching over you," "Silence and reserve," and various others of the same sort, intended to stir them up and perplex them, but they usually made believe that they did not understand, whether they did not understand them really, or whether they ascribed to the diplomatic manœuvres of the caballero less importance than they deserved. José alone was in some degree impressed, although he did not confide much in their efficacy.

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One day Don Fernando called him into his inn, and presenting a paper to him said :

“It is necessary for Elisa to sign this document.”

“But, how?”

“Put it in your pocket. Provide yourself with an ink-horn and a pen, and on the first opportunity — you understand?”

“Yes, señor.”

“We depend on that.”

On receiving the paper after a few days with the signature, the caballero said to him :

“You must ask Elisa if she is ready for everything, to disobey her mother, and to live away from her house for some months, in order to be married to you.”

This commission was much more embarrassing and difficult for the seaman. Elisa could not decide to take a step of so much daring. It was not timidity or fear of committing a sin against filial duty that restrained her, for from the curé who confessed her she knew that by an irrational opposition, or one founded solely

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on motives of interest, parents lost the right of being obeyed ; but she had always lived in such subjection to her mother, and had so much fear of her cold, cruel anger, that the idea of appearing before her in full rebellion appalled her. It was necessary for many days to go by, and for José to supplicate her an indefinite number of times with tears in his eyes, and for her to persuade herself that there was absolutely no other way of getting out of their distressing position and obtaining what was so ardently desired, that she at last came to consent to it.

When Señor de Meira was informed of this concession, he said to José, in the imperative tone proper to his rank :

“This afternoon come and look me up. We shall have you united.”

José bowed his head in token of submission.

“You are ready for anything?”

The same sign of respect.

“Perfectly. You are not unworthy of the

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high opinion that I had formed of you. In difficult matters it is necessary to join diplomacy with courage; understand that well. Such have always been the characteristics of my family — prudence and decision. The governor, Don Alonso de Revollar, an ancestor of mine in the female line, passed in his time, during the wars with America in Pizarro's day, for a consummate diplomat, and yet this did not diminish his courage, which often reached temerity."

"And at what hour do you wish me to come for you?" asked José, fearing with reason that the caballero would wander off into digressions, as he was accustomed to do.

"After dinner. At one o'clock."

"Then, with your permission, Don Fernando, I will go and mend a net."

"Very well, very well. *Hasta la vista.*"

At the hour indicated the mariner was at the inn of the Señor de Meira; in a little while they went out together and directed their steps through the street leading down to the shore.

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Before reaching it, Don Fernando paused before a house somewhat more decent than those adjoining.

“Stop. We are going to enter here.”

“The house of Don Cipriano?”

“The house of Don Cipriano.”

The Señor de Meira knocked at the door, and asked if it were possible to see señor the municipal judge. The old woman who came out to open the door, sister of the justice, told them that he was asleep, taking his siesta. Don Fernando insisted; it was an important affair. The old woman, out of temper and growling, as she was far from recognizing the seignorial rights of Señor de Meira, took herself off at last to awaken her brother.

Don Cipriano, whom we have the honor of knowing, having seen him in the maestra's shop, received them affably, although showing his surprise.

“What is the news, Don Fernando?”

Don Fernando drew from the pocket of his threadbare coat a paper, unfolded it with aca-

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demic deliberation, and offered it gravely to the judge.

“What is this?”

“A petition from Doña Elisa Vega, praying that she be released from the authority of her mother and committing herself to the protection of the law in order to contract marriage.”

Don Cipriano gave a start backwards.

“How? Elisita, the daughter of the school-master’s wife?”

Don Fernando inclined his head in sign of assent.

The municipal judge made haste to snatch up his silver spectacles which were lying on the table, and to put them on in order to read the document.

The reading was lengthy because Don Cipriano, in these literary matters, had walked all his life with feet of lead. While this was going on José kept his eyes fixed anxiously upon him. The Señor de Meira absently stroked his long white imperial.

“I had not suspected this!” exclaimed the

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judge, lifting his head at last; "and to tell the truth, I can't help confessing that I feel it, because after all, the maestra and her husband are my friends, and they are going to find this a great trial. Did you write this petition, Don Fernando?"

"Is it *en regla*, señor judge?" responded he, gravely.

"Yes, señor."

"Enough, then; there is no necessity of anything further."

Don Cipriano had turned pale, then red. There was never a more sensitive man in all the world; a glance could wound him, a word make him beside himself. He thought that Don Fernando had wished to give him a lesson in delicacy, and showed that he felt it immensely.

"Señor Don Fernando, I do not claim —. These words — seem — to me —"

"It was not my intention to offend you, señor judge. I wished only to make clear my right to keep silence before a functionary. For the rest, you have been my friend for a long

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time and I always esteem it a great pleasure to offer you my hand. It is enough that you belong in the service of his majesty for you to be accorded the highest consideration on the part of all well-born men."

The tone and attitude with which Don Fernando pronounced these words must have been very similar to those used in remote times by the nobility in directing some member of their peasantry when they had gone into a deliberation over some of the affairs of government with him. But Don Cipriano, who was not familiar with these purely historic manners, instead of being more offended, calmed himself quickly.

"Thank you, Don Fernando; thank you very much. As I appreciate that family so much—"

"I appreciate it also. But let us come to the case in hand. Elisa wishes to be married to this young man. Her mother hinders her for no reason whatever; because he is poor, perhaps; or perhaps (I do not affirm it, I give it as a hypothesis) not to let go of the property

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of the dead Vega with which she trades and makes money. There is nothing else to do but to have recourse to the protection of the law, and the girl has turned to it."

"That is all right. Now the next step in the proceedings is that I come and ask the girl if she ratifies what is herein requested. In case she affirms it, we can proceed."

"And when?"

"To-day itself. This afternoon, if you two wish."

"If this afternoon, señor judge," José pointed out, "it will be known to the whole town, and there will be a scandal. If you please, let it go until after dark."

"As you like; it is all the same to me. But I notify you that the presence of the secretary is necessary, and to-day he is in Peñacosa."

"Don Telesforo will be here by dark," said the Señor de Meira.

"Then I have nothing to object to. I shall expect you as soon as it is dark."

"Now, Don Cipriano," said the Señor de

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Meira, bowing gravely, "I hope nobody is going to know of what passes here."

"Why do you care to say such a thing, Don Fernando!" asked the justice, again turning pale.

Don Fernando smiled benevolently.

"Nothing that could offend you, señor judge. You are a man of honor, and there is no necessity to recommend secrecy to you in regard to matters that require it. I only wished to say that in this affair the utmost secrecy is necessary to us, that nobody suspects our purpose, and that absolutely nothing comes to light."

"That is another thing," replied Don Cipriano, pacified.

"It is agreed, then, is it not, that after night-fall you will expect us?"

"Yes, señor."

"*Hasta la vista*, then."

The official held out his hand to the representative of the third estate.

"*Adios*, Don Fernando. *Adios*, José."

So when night closed in, an August night,

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warm and starry, Don Fernando, Don Telesforo (who had opportunely arrived a few moments before) and José went once more to the house of the justice. Only Don Telesforo went upstairs; the nobleman and the mariner waited at the door. In a little while Don Cipriano came out accompanied by his great staff of office with its gilt handle and tassel, and further off by the secretary of the judicial court. The four, after having exchanged friendly salutes in a strained tone, directed their steps silently in the direction of the maestra's house.

The taverns were, as always at that hour, overflowing with people; from their open doors came forth light, and the confused, disagreeable noise of voices and oaths; our friends got as far as possible from these open doors so as not to be noticed. The poor José went trembling with alarm. He, so serene and brave before the attacks of the sea, felt his heart shrink and his legs doubling beneath him as he imagined what the maestra would do when she saw through the plan. More than twenty times he was

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on the point of running away, leaving the gentlemen to get out of their task by themselves; nothing kept him but the thought that Elisa was going to need his presence to give her strength. How was the poor little thing feeling at this moment? On asking himself this, José took courage and went forward, walking behind the three old men.

When they arrived in front of the maestra's house the justice paused and said, lowering his voice all he could, "Now I am going to enter alone with Don Telesforo. You Don Fernando, may remain with José near the door, to give, if she needs it, encouragement to the child."

The seaman assented with all his heart, for at that moment you could have knocked him down with a straw. Don Cipriano and Don Telesforo separated from them; the light of the shop illuminated them for an instant. They entered.

José's body shook with a chill of sudden terror and dread.

XIV

IN the maestra's shop were congregated, as every night at this hour, a number of seamen and several fishwives who paid tribute to the wealth and importance of the seña Isabel. There were also a sea captain and a Maragato man who traded in fish. The company kept silence, hanging upon the lips of the venerable Don Claudio, who, seated behind the counter in an antique sole-leather chair, read in high voice by the light of the lamp, from a worn and greasy book.

It was their custom on winter nights to solace themselves with the reading of some novel; the women especially enjoyed following their melancholy adventures. For it was always the saddest story ever told, and if not, the assemblage got bored. A wife abandoned by her husband, who by force of patience and sweetness contrived to bring him back to her arms

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again ; the adventures of a deserted child who at the last turned out to be the son of a duke, or something of the sort ; the toils of lovers cruelly persecuted by fate for many years ; there were two or three dozen of these novels in Rodillero that had gone the round of the town many times, always with the same flattering success, and with a little more grease added daily to their covers ; all “ended well” ; this was an indispensable requisite. Don Claudio was very sensitive to narrated misfortunes, and used to weep over them ; when he had a cold nothing could keep him from reading, as it relieved his head a little.

The novel that he now had in his hands was entitled, “Maclovía and Federico, or the Mines of the Tyrol.” It was a moving tale of the trials of lovers who, having been born at the top of the heap, were reduced, through the severities of their parents, to work with their hands for a living. Federico and Maclovía married secretly ; her father, who was a prince of the worst sort of disposition, persecuted them ; they fled, and Federico went into the mines as a day-

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laborer; his young spouse, with admirable valor, followed him; they had a son; they endured a thousand tribulations and injustices; at last the prince sweetened up and came and rescued them from so much misfortune, carrying them in triumph to his palace. The women, and the men too, were mightily interested, and anxious to know how it was going to turn out. From time to time some one of the women would exclaim in a tone of pity:

“Oh, my poor, little dear, what a pass to come to.”

Compassion was always the feminine element of the work.

The seña Isabel was sewing, according to her habit, behind the counter at the side of her faithful spouse; she did not seem to be very much moved by the trials of the young lovers. Elisa also was seated sewing, but she frequently got up from her chair, under various pretences, discovering a certain disquietude which immediately attracted the attention of the sagacious maestra.

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“But, girl, how restless you are to-day!”

It was not restlessness, but fear, and very great fear, that the girl felt. Twenty times she repented of having yielded to the entreaties of José. Thinking of what was going to happen that night, she felt herself shivering; her heart beat so fast in her bosom that it seemed strange to her that the others did not notice it. She had already prayed to all the saints of heaven, and had promised them a thousand sacrifices if they would get her safely out of this danger.

“*Dios mio*,” she would say to herself, “let no vengeance fall.”

And every moment she kept giving frightened glances at the door. Isabel observed that she was at times pale, then as red as a poppy.

“Look, Elisa, you are sick?”

“Yes, mother, I feel badly,” she replied joyfully, delighted at the notion of getting away.

“Then go; go to bed; perhaps it is the beginning of a cold.”

The young girl desired nothing better, and springing up, with her work in her hands, disap-

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peared quickly by the little door at the back of the shop. She sprang up the stairs as if she were flying from imminent peril; but on reaching the sala, was petrified by hearing in the shop the voice of Don Cipriano.

He and Don Telesforo had indeed entered that very moment.

“*Buenas noches, señores.*”

“*Buenas noches,*” they all made answer.

The maestra was very much surprised, because Don Telesforo had quarrelled with her some time before, and did not frequent her shop. After a moment of somewhat embarrassed silence, Don Cipriano inquired amiably :

“And Elisita?”

“She has just gone up to bed. She felt a little ill,” replied the seña Isabel.

“I must have a few little words with her,” said the justice, using diminutives all the time.

The maestra turned terribly pale, for she divined the truth.

“Very well, I will call her,” she said in a thick voice, rising from her chair.

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"It is not necessary for you to disturb yourself. I will go upstairs, if she has not yet gone to bed."

"We will go up, if you like."

The justice extended his hand, as if to detain her, saying :

"Permit me, Señora Isabel. The business we have in hand is private. The only one who should go up with me is Don Telesforo."

The maestra cast a sinister glance at him. Don Cipriano grew redder and redder.

"I do not much like it, señora, but it is necessary," and not to endure longer the old woman's eyes, he made haste to go upstairs, followed by the secretary.

The venerable Don Claudio, prodigiously affected by this scene, let the unlucky Maclovia fall upon the floor and did not even try to pick her up. He opened his eyes so wide, staring at his wife, that it was a miracle of heaven that they did not start from their sockets. The maestra, motionless, stood rooted to the floor, in the same spot where Don Cipriano had left

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her, and did not take her eyes off the door through which he had gone out.

“Well,” she said at last, with concentrated rage, passing her hand across her face, “the child is there, dead in love. They are going to marry her out of hand.”

“How marry her?” asked Don Claudio.

His wife gave him a look of disgust, and turning to those present, who were stupefied, not knowing what it all was, added :

“What, don’t ye understand it yet? Well, it’s plain enough. That wretched widow is in need of cash, and wants to carry off my Elisa.”

José heard these words perfectly plainly, and trembled as if he had been wounded. Don Fernando tried to soothe him, putting his hand on his shoulder, but he was far from finding himself tranquil; therefore he gravely stroked his long white imperial until he nearly pulled it out; the agitation went on within.

“I believe,” said one of the company, “that this has been arranged for some time.”

“According to appearances, yes,” replied the

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maestra; "besides you have all seen how this drunkard tried to rob me of her once before."

"But this is an act of rebellion on the part of Elisa, which merits an exemplary chastisement," burst forth Don Claudio; "I will shut her up in the factory and keep her on bread and water for a fortnight."

"And you! I will shut you up in the stable for an ass," said the seña Isabel, unloading upon her consort the weight of anger that overpowered her.

"Wife! this is severe. What good does it do? It seems to me as if you are giving way to passion at present."

The face of the schoolmaster, as he proffered these words, reflected indignation and fear at the same time, although it may as well be said it was like nothing more than the face of a terrier dog.

His spouse, taking no notice of him, went on talking with apparent calm.

"Oh, how this is going to satisfy the widow's

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hankering! How happy it will make her! If it had not been, she would have been having a fit again some fine day."

"But who would have believed it of such a good girl as Elisa!" exclaimed one of the women.

"The poor thing has got her head filled with wind," said the maestra; "she thinks there are heaps and piles in this house, and that it all belongs to her. She and her lover are going to have a bad disappointment."

"Señora Isabel," said the justice, who came down at that moment, "Elisa has petitioned the law to be married and has just ratified her petition. There is no way for me to do except to grant it. I feel it in my soul, giving you this trouble, but the law, — I could do no less."

The maestra, after looking at him fixedly, gave a deprecatory puff with her lips.

"Don't worry yourself, Don Cipriano; it might make you sick."

A great wave of color mounted to the face of the sensitive official.

JOSÉ

“Señora, remember to whom you speak.”

“To the son of Pepa of the bake-shop,” she said, dropping her voice, and turning her back upon him.

The captain, Don Cipriano, was indeed son of a humble baker-woman, and had risen from the ranks. He was not one of those who concealed his origin, nor believed himself dishonored by it; but the tone of contempt with which the maestra uttered these words wounded him so profoundly that he could not articulate anything. After moving his lips several times without producing any sound whatever, he broke forth at last in a trembling voice:

“Hush your vile tongue, or by the Lord’s life, I will have you carried off to jail.”

The maestra did not answer, fearing, no doubt, that the exasperated judge would fulfill his threat. She contented herself with laughing, turned toward the company.

Don Cipriano, conquering his emotion, or at least recovering from it, said in imperative accents :

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“Let us see; you may designate the woman who shall have charge of your daughter during the legal interim.”

The maestra turned her head, glanced at him disdainfully once more and began to sing, facing her friends:

“Tan tarantan! the figs are green!”

Seeing this, Don Cipriano said, still more imperiously:

“You see that, Don Telesforo. You may now certify that the señora does not care to designate the person who shall have her daughter in charge in her house during the period of guardianship.”

After having given this order, he went out of the shop through the door; there was Elisa in the dark, trembling with fear. When he had spoken a few words with her, he turned and entered.

“In the exercise of the right that the law gives me, I designate Doña Rafaela Moran, godmother of the person interested, to hold her under her authority until the expiration of

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the period of guardianship required by the law."

While Don Telesforo executed these formalities, the seamen and fishwives present commenced to console the seña Isabel, and to utter countless comments and explanations of the scene that had been enacted; conquering the surprise that had kept them quiet, they gave rein to their tongues in such fashion that the place seemed like a poultry-yard.

"But how did that child ever dare to take such a step?" said one.

"After all, what can be done about it? There is nothing to do but take it calmly, Isabel," said an old woman who guessed nothing of the bitterness that the maestra suffered.

"As for me, if I were in her place," said another, who measured it much less, "I should not bother myself about it at all. If the girl wishes to leave home, go, and God bless you! I will give you your own, and we will be at peace."

The maestra cast a quiet glance of wrath upon

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her; the old woman smiled with her lips only; she had already been wounded to the quick.

“The worst of all is the example, Don Claudio,” said the Maragato man.

“You are right, the example! the example!” exclaimed that one, raising his eyes and his hands to heaven.

“I scented that Elisa had some secret,” spoke up an ancient mariner; “I have twice seen her talking with Don Fernando de Meira on the road from San Esteban, and I observed that when they spied me, they hurried away, one in one direction, and one in another.

“Then another thing struck me,” said the sea-captain. “Going one evening towards Peña-cosa, rather more than half a mile from here, I encountered Don Fernando in close conversation with Elisa, and I noticed that the widow of Ramon de Puente made haste to separate them.”

“It seems to me that here has been meddling the hand of the señor of the grand house of Meira,” exclaimed the maestra.

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On hearing this gross insult, Don Fernando could not contain himself, and entered like a hurricane through the shop-door, with pale cheeks and blazing eyes.

“I hear you, you great coward! Rinse your mouth before you dare to speak of the house of Meira.”

“I did not say anything,” exclaimed the the maestra, at the same time breaking out into loud, rough laughter. “Behold the marquis of the ragged breeches!” And facing him, she added sarcastically, “How many scraps of bread did they give you, señor marquis, for taking care of this matter?”

The company laughed. The poor gentleman stood browbeaten; anger and indignation nearly choked him; he realized that it was impossible to contend with the shamelessness and effrontery of that woman, and he went out of the shop pale and convulsed. But the maestra, seeing her prize was escaping, yelled after him:

“Go along, you poverty-stricken thing! They have stuffed your pockets, to serve as a

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screen for them, have they? Go, and never come back, hanger-on! sponge! sucker!"

The poor Señor de Meira on receiving this hailstorm of insults to his back, turned, shook his fists, and found strength to inquire:

"Why does n't some one run that infamous woman's tongue through with a red-hot iron?"

In saying this, he recalled, doubtless, the terrible punishments that his ancestors inflicted upon insolent peasants. But in the shop these terrifying words were received with a general laugh.

Don Telesforo, meanwhile, had finished writing. The justice, more offended than ever with the maestra, said to the secretary:

"Do me the favor to notify the mother of the young woman that she must deliver up her bed and her wearing apparel in use."

"I will deliver up nothing, because all that is in this house is mine," said the old woman, growing very serious.

"You may inform the señora," continued the justice, addressing Don Telesforo, "that we

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shall see ; for the time being she is to deliver up the bed and wearing apparel that the law concedes to the sequestered daughter."

"Well, I am not going to deliver up anything."

"Well, then, we shall take them !" exclaimed Don Cipriano, exasperated. "We shall see. You two may come with me to serve as witnesses."

And he summoned a couple of seamen, and obliged them to go up with him to Elisa's quarters. She was sobbing by the door, listening in affright to the atrocious insults that her mother, pacing up and down the shop like a fury, was hurling at her and her betrothed and at all of his family.

After a moment Don Cipriano came down.

"Elisa, come up with me and point out your clothes."

"For God's sake, señor judge ! Let me be, for God's sake ! I don't wish to carry anything away with me."

Don Cipriano, respecting the young girl's

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grief and her delicacy, did not care to insist to her. But he went out into the street and found José, and made him get and carry off on his back Elisa's bed and some of her wearing apparel.

After the door was shut upon her, he and Don Fernando placed her between them, and directed their way to the house of her god-mother, escorted by the secretary and several women and mariners who joined them at the door of the shop.

José marched on ahead, trotting along under his big burden.

XV

THE three months went by that the law requires to wait for the parental consent. They did not pass as happily as might be supposed. Elisa was not contented in her godmother's house. She was a selfish, impudent old egoist, who stormed all day long at her hens, at her pig, and at her cat. Accustomed to this constant growling and storming, she soon came to consider her goddaughter as one of her domestic animals, and heaped the same sort of talk upon her. From time to time she threw in her face, directly or indirectly, the favor that she was doing her, a favor that the young woman had promised to repay her when she came into possession of her property. Then, too, Elisa's rebellion against her mother kept her sorrowful. She felt remorseful and half ready to cry; more than once she felt like going home, to throw

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herself at the feet of Isabel and beg her pardon. José sustained her with his passion, reviving and sweet to the pair, in those moments of hesitancy so natural to a good sensitive girl. She scarcely ever went out into the street. Only in the dark, when her lover was on his way home from sea, she spoke a few words with him in front of the door of her god-mother, who never left them at all to themselves, more from love of annoying them than to take care of her goddaughter.

Once in awhile, very seldom, the three went out to take a walk by some lonely road, in order that nobody should see them. The innocent girl imagined that her conduct was judged very severely in Rodillero, and that everybody was down on her. It was not true. The people in the place, without a single exception, found her resolution justifiable, and were not a little delighted with her. Everybody hated the maestra.

There was also an event that made a melancholy impression upon her as well as upon

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José, and which made noise enough in the village. Don Fernando of the House of Meira had disappeared from Rodillero a few days after having sequestered Elisa; he confided in nobody, and nobody knew where he had gone. All the inquiries that were made to discover his hiding-place were unfruitful.

José felt great anxiety, because he had already taken in almost three thousand reals from the bonito fishing, and thought that he ought at once to return some on account of the ten thousand that he had received, figuring, not without reason, that the money that Don Fernando had left out of the fourteen thousand that Don Anacleto had paid him for the house must be very nearly gone. He may have gone mad, thinking that perhaps he would be brought to want, and not wishing to come to the shame of beggary; perhaps the poor gentleman to whom he owed so many favors had fled the world. José went in search of him all the same, neglecting his boat and work, but after having looked for

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days everywhere in the vicinity, and having extended his trips to various distant parts of the province, asking questions in all places, he saw the necessity of returning without finding out anything. This kept him very much depressed.

The bonito catch was as good that year as it had been the year before; the boat that José had bought of a Vizcayan shipwright worked admirably all summer. His crew, among whom figured as before the satirical Bernardo and the impressive Corsario, was most contented, not only for the gains that they saw coming, but also in seeing poor José, whose earnestness they all appreciated, at the end of his misfortunes, and on the eve of being happy. There was repeated without especial variations what happened in the beginning of this story. Bernardo played jokes on his companions, and, especially on Corsario, amusing tricks like that old trick of the stone. Not even José escaped unscathed. Frequently they asked him, When are we going to see

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that comedy? How soon shall we expect to walk over to see the actors? They all knew what that meant, and laughed, recollecting the promise that José had made them the year before to give them money on his wedding-day to go to Sarrio to see a play at a theatre. The only difference, and this did not weigh on them a bit, was that this year there were a great many sardines. The old men, while the others were out for the highly stubborn bonito, kept in along shore with the little boats, and went out morning and afternoon to return loaded with fish. In a few months a deal of money had come into the village. The *escabeche* factories were going night and day. The street could not be seen for Maragato men and their carts piled high with barrels. The horn of plenty had been emptied all at once upon Rodillero; and, as always happens in such cases, instead of laying aside a part of their gains to support them in days of want, all of it was poured into the taverns and into the market. Among fishermen frugality is

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scarcely known; but they are to be excused for that; the constant peril in which they live has relieved them of the faculty of foresight, which is so much developed among country people. The rough and heavy toils in which they are engaged make them crave eagerly the moments of expansion and noisy delight that wine imparts.

That which was to be expected came to pass; behind the good times came bad ones. The bonito catch came to an end, and the sardine was also almost at the last gasp, leaving the boats waiting for some time for cod and conger. The mariners, during the time of repose, lived in the taverns or went up the sea-beaches in parties, scrutinizing the horizon, and giving their opinion upon the sails that crossed the horizon. During these days they ate what was left of the fat pickings of the summer.

But winter did not start in kindly. When they began to go out for cod, they returned on most days with no fish or with very little. Then too they felt on various occasions the

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sudden lashings of the nor'wester, which made them anxious. They gave up fishing then, and waited until the more propitious season arrived for bream. The month of December came in yet more wild and changeful than November; but as they had no choice between going to sea and succumbing to hunger, or going out and begging charity from the surrounding hamlets — a thing which was never done except in the last straits — they began to work at the bream fishing, although full of doubts and prepared for any event whatever. The weather went from bad to worse; some serene days arrived that gave them hopes of better weather; but it changed immediately, and it began to lower along the horizon ugly and grim.

A certain happening rumored in the place overwhelmed the people with a still more mistrustful feeling. It was said that a boy had on several nights seen three of the boats go out from shore manned by a crew of men dressed in white, and that, at the end of two or

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three hours, he had seen them come back again empty. It is not easy to depict the terror that this news produced in the village, especially upon the women; the men also were frightened, but they pretended that they were not.

To the general sadness which hung over the village, and in which they bore no small share, Elisa and José added a sorrow which sincerely affected them. They believed, on evidence that appeared, that Don Fernando must have met his death in a road of the sierra, while going into the mountain region of Leon. It was said and supposed among the neighbors that the caballero was probably going by night to try to borrow money on interest according to his custom, and had been killed by a fall. But others, having no respect for the memory of the knight commander of Villaplana, the deputy of the Cortes of Toro, the president of the council of Italy and the judge of the Mexican Supreme Court, asserted that Don Fernando had gone begging alms and had perished by hunger and cold.

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Be this as it might, his death caused sorrow to the whole village, for he was universally beloved. Elisa wept for him as for a father, and José went about for days, silent and brooding. But at last their preparations for the wedding dried their tears and occupied their attention exclusively. They thought of being married during the first days of December, but it was not possible because of certain difficulties that the priest made, which they had to get over, and also because they could not find a house. José did not wish to live with his mother in any sort of arrangement, because, knowing her disposition, he knew that Elisa would be sure to have trouble with her, all the more that she already loved her most affectionately. They fixed the wedding for the new year. The preliminaries, always so delightful to lovers, were not so many as usual on account of the especial circumstances in which they found themselves, and on account, too, of the atmosphere of gloom that weighed down the village.

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The weather came on so heavy and the doubts of the seamen were so great that the owners of the boats joined in watching, taking turns, three at a time by night, so as to watch carefully the state of the sea and sky, and, after taking their observations, decide whether to call out their crews or not. Further, as they generally went out before daylight, it was agreed that the boat that went out first or went out ahead should put out a light in case she found it dangerous to go out, which was to serve as a signal to the others to put about and make into port. Two nights before the event that we are about to narrate it had fallen to José to stand guard with the others; they saw that the horizon was threatening, and did not fail to give warning against going out. But as it had already been several days that the fishing had been at a standstill, there were some who complained of this decision in the tavern. The day had cleared a little, but not much. That night three other boat owners were to watch, and they hesitated a good while

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before giving the boy the order to call up the men to return to the fishing, as the looks of things were ugly and threatening as they seldom were ; but at last they gave it, thinking of the woful want of the people, or perhaps fearing complaints.

José was one of the first who reached the shore.

“Ave Maria, what barbarity !” he exclaimed, looking at the sky. “What a night to choose for going out on the sea !”

But he was far too prudent to alarm his companions, and far too brave to refuse to go out. He held his tongue and helped his crew get his boat into the water ; as it was nearest it was soon afloat, and he was the first one ready. As soon as his crew were on board they began to row. There were more men than in summer, which is always the way, as much because in winter the men are not drawn away by other labors as because it is necessary on account of the frequent calms to have oars enough in the boat. In José’s there were fourteen.

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After they had got out awhile from port, José gave the order to hoist sail. The Asturian boats always carry five, the mainsail, the spritsail, the foresail, the foretopsail, and the jib or unction, which are used in different ways according to the violence of the wind. The unction carries this terrible name because it is the only one left up when they are on the point of perishing.

“What are we going to hoist, José?” asked one.

“The foresails,” he replied, dryly.

The seamen hoisted the mainsail and the foresail, for that was what the order signified.

The night was dark, but not very thick; the sky showed clear spots now and again; the black rounded heaps of clouds sped along with extreme velocity, which showed plainly that the wind blew a hurricane on high, even though it had not yet let its fury fall down below. This gave the greatest anxiety to José, who did not cease looking at the sky. They all went on silent and dejected; the cold para-

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lyzed their hands, and fear, that they could not conceal, their tongues. They cast frequent glances at the heavens, across which, with constantly increasing wrath, sped the clouds. The sea was suspiciously oily.

After gazing on this for a quarter of an hour, José suddenly broke the silence, flinging out an exclamation :

“This is a dirty trick. This is no day for even a dog to go out on the sea !”

Three or four seamen made haste to say :

“You are right ! It’s dirty weather. It is fit for hogs, but not for men.”

“As for us, José,” said one of them at last, “we are not going any further ; if it seems best to you to put about —”

José made no answer. He went on quietly for a few minutes, until, rising suddenly, he said, in a resolute tone :

“About ship ! Boy, light the lantern !”

The boy lit the lantern and hung it in the bow with visible satisfaction. The men put the boat about, pleased also, but not showing it.

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The boat began to luff and bore in towards Rodillero. At once could be seen the lights, near and far, one after another, of all the boats. This signified that they had seen the signal and were putting into port.

“He could not do any less,” said one.

“Who would go out on the sea to-day by choice,” said another, “but those asses, Nicolas and Toribio! What made them give the order to go out again?”

Everybody’s tongue was loosened. After going along talking for awhile, José observed the bulk of a boat that was passing not far from his own, without any light at the bow.

“Stop, boys,” said he. “What the devil is that? Where is that boat going?”

“That’s the question!”

The master stood up, and making a speaking-trumpet of his hands, called out:

“*Ah, de la lancha!*”

“What do you want, José?” answered the other, who knew him by his voice.

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"Where are you going, Hermengildo?" asked José, who also recognized him.

"To shore," replied the other, making haste outward as fast as possible.

"But have n't they all lighted the lanterns after I put mine up?"

"Yes; but I know the way of this village! You are accustomed to light your lanterns without paying the slightest attention to them. How much will you bet me that all the boats turn up to-day on the beach?"

"Cursed jealous," muttered José. Then he ordered the crew, "Put about! Some day, when we least expect it, we are going to have trouble from those screws."

The seamen executed the order with ill-humor.

"Have n't I told you many times, José," asked Bernardo, "that in this town anybody will squint because his neighbor is blind?"

The master did not answer.

"The curious part of it is," remarked the other, "that those imbeciles think they are

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going to impose upon us ; while here we all, dull or smart, have the backache from knowing with what sort of oxen we are dragging anchor."

"The laugh will come when we all see each other playing it on each other," added a third.

"We shall see whatever day brings," said José, "that there will not be lacking some one to throw the blame on."

"It is ever thus," returned Bernardo, with comic gravity.

After these words silence reigned in the boat. The seamen speechless scanned the horizon ; the master observed carefully the dark sky line constantly lifted, until there came a moment when the sky appeared to be entirely clear. But it was not long in clouding over again. However, the wind did not blow so hard, except on high. As daylight came that also grew calmer. The dawn was dull and murky as it seldom is ; the light filtered by tremendous effort through a triple cloak of clouds.

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When the boats that obeyed the signal arrived at the beach, it was seen that almost all the Rodillero boats had cast their lines, and were fishing not far from one another. The others did the same after lowering sail, and during the next two hours took aboard a few bream, not many. About ten o'clock the sky grew blacker than ever, and a squall came that brought a little wind with it; in half an hour came another, and the wind began to blow harder. Then several of the boats hauled in their tackle, and, hoisting sail, turned prow to land. The others, first one, then another, followed this example.

“Well, we did n't need baggage for this voyage,” said one of José's companions, making fast the foretopsail clew.

They were more than twenty miles from the coast. Before they had got two miles away from it, they had seen that the sky was darkening mightily towards the west. Such was the blackness that the seamen looked at one another aghast.

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“Mother of my soul, see what is coming!” exclaimed one.

José had ordered the sails hoisted after the first gust as a matter of precaution, that is, the foresail and jib. He looked fixedly at the west; the blackness was coming on rapidly. When he felt on his face the freshness that preceded the squall, he got upon his feet, shouting:

“Let go main sheets and halliards!”

The seamen without reckoning the danger made haste to obey. The sails fell heavily upon the thwarts, and it was just in the nick of time, for the most violent gust rushed whistling across the masts and dashed the craft forward. The mariners gave José a look which was a vote of thanks and confidence.

“How did he smell that confounded crack of the whip?” said one.

But looking out to sea again, they saw that one of the boats had capsized. Again their faces turned towards José, pale as the dead.

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“Did you see that, José?” asked one, in a hoarse, trembling voice.

The owner closed his eyes in sign of assent. But the boy who was in the boat, on understanding what had happened, began to moan aloud.

“Oh, *Virgen Santisima*! What is going to become of us? *Madre mia*, what is going to become of us?”

José faced towards him with eyes fiery with anger, shouting:

“Silence, pig, or I will throw you into the water this moment!”

The frightened little fellow held his peace.

“Raise the foresail and jib,” he ordered next. This was quickly done.

José bore away as much as he could, taking care not to lose sight of the lines of Rodillero; the boat began to sail with extraordinary swiftness, as the wind was blowing constantly wilder and more wild. It was not long before there was a heavy swell on, and high waves that kept them from seeing the course of the other boats,

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and at short intervals drenched them copiously. The water bothered them a good deal; it was necessary for several men to keep busy bailing it out; but José paid more attention to the wind than to this; it blew so irregularly and treacherously that with the least neglect it was sure to capsize; then a dozen times he was obliged to lower sail in a hurry to avoid a catastrophe. At last, seeing the impossibility of going on under sail, he ordered the *uncion* up alone. The seamen looked at him in consternation; the hands of several of them trembled as they handled the rigging.

“We must bear away before the wind,” said José, with voice hoarse from shouting. “We can’t put into Rodillero. We shall have to make Sarrio!”

“It looks to me as if we should n’t make Sarrio, either,” said an old man under his voice.

“Don’t give way, boys. Cheer up! This is nothing,” said the master, energetically.

From the moment that they gave up getting

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into Rodillero, and put her head to the wind, the sea began to inspire much alarm ; the swell helped by the oily waves of the night had changed the sea into hills and hollows, terrible and imposing. The dashings over the bow were so great and continued that at last it was necessary to luff a little, and go broadside on to the waves, by which the boat ran imminent peril of being submerged ; for all this, many of them went on bailing out the water. The seas grew heavier ; the waves every moment higher ; the boat disappeared below them and by a miracle came up again. One of the waves had carried away her tiller. José hastily seized the one he had in reserve, but just as he was getting it into place, another surge wrenched it from his hands, and flung it overboard two or three cask-lengths away.

The boy began to exclaim, sobbing :

“ Oh, mother of my soul, we are lost ! ”

José threw the part of the new helm that he had left on a thwart at his head.

“ Shut up, *ladron*, or I ’ll kill you ! ”

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And seeing signs of terror on the faces of his companions, he said, throwing fierce glances at them :

“ The first one that gives me a howl, I ’ll wring his neck ! ”

This harshness was necessary ; panic was getting possession of the boat’s company, and to lessen his hold one instant was to go to the bottom without delay.

As a substitute for the tiller, he took an oar from the bow. With the sails up, it would have been quite impossible to manage her with an oar, but as there was nothing up but the little jib, he was able to scull at the cost of tremendous exertions, and to keep the boat under a little control.

Each surge threw an immense amount of water over them, and, although a man working hard could bail out a barrel of water with a bucket in eight or ten minutes, it was impossible to throw it all out ; it was already almost knee deep. José never stopped crying, with the little voice he had left :

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“Bail, boys, bail! Courage, boys! Bail! bail!”

A wave carried off Bernardo's cap.

“Go it!” he said, furiously; “you are soon going to take my head.”

It was an anguished situation. Although they contrived to hide it, terror had got possession of them all. Then José seeing that their strength was soon going to fail, said to them:

“Boys, we are running through a big storm; don't you want to call upon the Santo Cristo of Rodillero to aid us, that he may pull us through?”

“Yes, José,” they all answered, with a promptness that showed their agony of spirit.

“Very well; we offer him to go barefooted to mass, if you wish. But it is necessary to serve him by showing our courage. There is nothing to be afraid of! Cheer up and bail! Bail, boys!”

The offering gave them confidence, and in faith they went on working in such fashion

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that in a few minutes the greater part of the water had been got out, and the boat was much eased.

José noticed that the mainmast was quivering.

“Look, we must chop away the mainmast!” he said, and at the same time rushed forward to seize the mast with both hands.

But in that moment he saw with horror an immense wave coming upon him high as a mountain and black as a cave.

“José, there is no chance for that comedy!” exclaimed Bernardo, resigned to die.

The blow was a rough one, knocking José face down upon the thwarts, almost into the water. But he, although badly shaken up, got up, crying bravely :

“Bail, bail ! That was nothing !”

XVI

WHAT was going on in Rodillero? The few boats that had obeyed José's signal returned to port before dawn; their crews were ashamed and depressed on seeing how meanly they had been tricked, all the more over the contemptuous joking of the women when they got home.

"You have been an idiot. When are you going to get to know whom you are dealing with, man alive? There will be a great catch to-day, you'll see!"

They held their tongues, according to their custom, knowing that they had the right on their side; and swearing internally that they would not fall into the trap another time.

But as day came they modified this opinion a little; so woful was the aspect of the sea, and so ugly the sky line, that their enforced leisure did not weigh much upon them.

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When wrapped in the squall, the first gusts of the nor'wester began making themselves felt, some of them turned to their wives, smiling :

“ How does this seem to you ? You would enjoy having me out on the sea, now, would n't you ? ”

This made them hush. The second squall, much more severe than the first, put the inhabitants into commotion. Men and women ran to the shore, and from there, in spite of the water that was falling in torrents, they went up to San Esteban. The fear of boats foundering was written plainly on all their faces, and showed very plainly the force of the disquieting suspicion that had reigned all winter. The women looked out of the corner of the eye at the old men ; these screwed up their faces. Some women approached one and asked :

“ There is something to be distressed about, Uncle Pepe ? ”

Uncle Pepe, without taking his eyes from the horizon, made answer :

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“It is n’t very good. But the sea does n’t say, ‘Here I am’ yet.”

It said it, however, sooner than he thought. The tempest came, swiftly, furiously. The seas in an instant began rolling in formidable fashion, and began to break on St. Peter’s Bones, which were the shoals nearest the coast. In a little while they were breaking also on the Basket, which was nearest on the other side of the bay. The crowd that crowned the mountain of San Esteban watched the progress of the storm with terror; some of the women began to weep.

There was not yet, however, reason for affliction, said the experienced; the port was entirely free; if they did not capsize (and this was not likely, for they knew how to avoid that) they could make Rodillero without danger. Some one asked:

“And those high seas? Will they have time to bail out the water?”

“Of course they will have time! Anybody would think we had never before seen a sea

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on ! There never was such a town as this to upset itself for nothing ! ” said a bilious seaman.

The energy with which these words were uttered hushed the pessimists and quieted the women a little. Unfortunately, their triumph lasted but a little while ; in a few minutes the seas broke over the Wheel, another of the shoals of the bar.

Near the chapel of San Esteban was a hut in which lived a laborer employed by seafarers, and recipient of a small annual stipend for lighting the bonfires that serve as signals in days and nights of peril. This workman, although he had been out very seldom, knew the sea as if he followed it. After observing it attentively for a good while, and having hesitated a good deal, pulled out of the shelter of his little yard a lot of dry broom and furze, heaped it on the highest point of the mountain, and set it on fire. It was the first official notice for the fishermen.

Elisa, who found herself in the crowd near

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her godmother, seeing the bonfire, felt her heart stop ; she remembered the terrible curse of the sacristan's wife, and all the presentiments, the sorrowful and fear-inspiring superstitions that slept in her soul, awoke all at once. She managed to conceal them, though, out of bashfulness, and began to go about among the groups, listening with ill-concealed anxiety to the opinions of the mariners ; every phrase made her stiffer with fear.

There was little talking and much looking among the people ; the wind beat into their faces the last drops of the squall. The seas grew heavier rapidly ; after breaking upon St. Peter's Bones, the Basket, and the Wheel, they were now roaring over a reef further out from the coast.

“ They are breaking on the Boiler ! Manuel, can't you light another bonfire ? ” exclaimed a seaman. Manuel ran to the house again, brought out another lot of furze, and set it on fire near the first. This was the signal of imminent danger ; if those who were at sea

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did not make haste to put into port, they ran the risk of soon being shut out of it.

“Can you see a single boat, Rafael?” asked a young girl, down whose cheeks rolled two great tears.

“Not just now; the spray cuts off our view.”

Not a sail appeared upon the horizon. Anxiety and anguish bore so heavily upon the watchers that several minutes passed without a voice being heard among them. All kept their sight strained on the Chariot, a short space where the waters rode free of the Rodillero bar, and through which the boats came in readily when the sea was rough. Elisa felt drops of cold sweat on her brow, and leaned heavily upon her godmother, so as not to fall.

Thus a quarter of an hour went by. Soon from that multitude went up a cry, a lament, more weak, but sadder than the noises of the ocean. The bar was now no more than one fringe of foam. The port was closed.

Manuel, pale and silent, went to get a new

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load and light it beside the other two. The rain had quite stopped falling, and the bonfires flamed up brightly in the wind.

Elisa, on hearing that cry, shuddered, then, by an irresistible impulse like to an inspiration, she hastened away, running from that scene down through the pines, across the deserted village, up to the shelter of the church, and reached its doors, eager and panting. She paused a moment to take breath, then, after making the sign of the cross, she went upon her knees and thus made her way on them up the nave of the temple to the high altar; but instead of stopping there, she turned to the right and began painfully to mount the winding stair that led to the shrine of the Christ. It was the penitential stairway, and every one of its steps of stone was already worn down by the knees of the devout; those of Elisa, when she got to the top, were dripping blood.

The shrine was a dark place covered with offerings and pictures, with a grated window opening into the church where the faithful

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could see the revered image on days when they ministered at his altar. The Santo Cristo was, as usual, covered by a curtain of velvet. Elisa hastened to put aside this curtain with trembling hand, and prostrated herself. A little while later, many women, one after another, entered the place and prostrated themselves also in silence. Some of them sobbed, irrepressibly, moved from time to time by the mystery and majesty of the shrine of adoration.

By evening the seas went down a little, and thanks to this, a large group of boats was able, although perilously, to come in to Rodillero; later many others came in, but when night fell there were five lacking. One of these was José's boat. The seamen, who knew that they must acknowledge their doom, because they had seen some go down, dared not say a word, and answered with evasions all the numberless questions that were asked them. Nobody knew anything; nobody had seen anything. The beach continued to be full of people until the late hours of the night;

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but as it advanced they grew discouraged. Little by little, therefore, the shore was depopulated; there remained on it only the families of those who were yet at sea. At last these, having almost lost hope, deserted the beach, and went into the town with death in the soul.

That horrible night! Still ring in my ears the heartrending wails of the unhappy wives, of children weeping for their fathers! The village wore a gloomy and frightful aspect; the people ran about the street in groups, or formed circles about the doors of the houses; all talked at once. The taverns were open, and in them men disputed hotly, throwing upon one another the blame for the misfortune. From time to time a woman, dishevelled, convulsed, crossed the street, uttering horrible cries that made hair stand on end. Within the houses, also, sounded groans and sobbings.

To this first moment of confusion succeeded another of calm, still sadder and more melan-

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choly, if it were possible. The people were shut into their dwellings and their grief took on a more resigned aspect. Within those poor huts how many tears were shed! In one of them, a poor old woman, who had two sons on the sea, uttered shrieks so penetrating that the few people that crossed the street paused, horror-stricken, at the door. In another, an unhappy wife who had lost her husband sobbed in a corner, while two little creatures of three and four years played about, eating filberts.

When God gave light, the village seemed like a cemetery. The priest had the bells rung, summoning to the church, and it was agreed by the faithful who hastened there to celebrate, the day following, a funeral mass for the repose of those who had perished.

But towards midday, the rumor ran, without any one's knowing who brought it, that some of the Rodillero boats had got in to the port of Banzones, seven leagues away. Such news caused immense emotion to the inhabitants.

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Hope, already dead, was quickly born anew in all hearts. Confusion and noise reigned again in the streets. They despatched their own runners to learn the truth; numberless were the comments, the hypotheses, that were made in their assemblages.

A day and a night passed once more in piteous anxiety and heartbreak; the poor women ran from group to group, pallid and tearful, wishing to surprise in the men's conversations something to encourage them.

At last at midnight arrived the word that only two of the boats had got in to Banzones. Which two? The runners did not know, or did not care to say. However, in a little while word began to spread that one of them was José's boat, the other that of Toribio.

Then in the afternoon a boy arrived, worn out, covered with sweat, and without his cap.

"They are there! They are there!"

"Which ones?"

"Many, many! There are many coming,"

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he managed to say with difficulty, for lack of breath. "They are now in Antromero."

Then there took place an indescribable change in the village. All of the neighbors, without one exception, flocked into the street, moved about a few short moments with a great clamor, then in one compact mass promptly abandoned the place. That mass went towards Antromero along the seashore in a state of agitation and anguish which it is difficult to describe. The men talked, making calculations about the method that their companions had taken to save themselves; the women went forward in silence, dragging their children who complained of being tired.

After going on for half a league, they could see from a certain point in the distance a group of seamen coming towards them with their oars over their shoulders. A tremendous shout arose from that multitude. The fishermen responded "Hurra!" waving their caps in air. Another cry rang out, and another followed that. In this way they hurried on as

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fast as they could to get within reach of each other.

Scene at once joyful and terrible! When the great and small groups mingled, shrieks of woe and cries of joy burst forth.

Women strained their eyes, seeking their own, and, not finding them, broke into heart-piercing wails, and flung themselves upon the ground, throwing out their arms in despair. Others, more fortunate in finding her heart's husband or the son of her bosom, cast themselves upon them like wild creatures and remained hanging upon them without strength enough in the world to tear themselves from them. The poor sailors, objects of this warm welcome, smiled, wishing to hide their emotion, but the tears ran down their cheeks in spite of themselves.

Elisa, who was one of the multitude, felt such a lump in her throat on seeing José, that she thought it would choke her; she put her hands to her face and broke into sobbing. The seaman was almost choked by the arms

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of his mother, but over her shoulder he looked eagerly for his promised wife. Elisa lifted her face to him ; they looked into each other's eyes and they kissed.

The first moment of expansion passed ; that mass of people returned with slow steps towards the village. Every one of the sailors was immediately surrounded by a group of friends who entered minutely and with interest into all the vicissitudes of their voyage. The women went behind ; sometimes, to make sure that these were alive, they would call them by their names ; when the men turned their heads, they had nothing to say to them.

That same day it was decided to give thanks to God the following day in a solemn festival. It turned out that almost all of the seamen had made the same offering, to go barefooted to hear mass at the altar of Christ. It was a very common offering in Rodillero in times of peril, and had descended from fathers to sons.

And so, on the following morning, they met on the shore, and from there every crew, with

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its captain at its head, went slowly towards the church, all barefooted and with uncovered heads. They walked grave and quiet, with sensitive, ardent faith in their eyes, although none know more of the bitterness of life. Behind came the women and children and the few gentlefolk of the village, silent also, overwhelmed by emotion on seeing these men, so strong and rugged, humble as the weakest creatures. The widows and orphans of those who had not returned from sea were there too, to pray for the repose of their own; they had put on a kerchief or an apron or a cap of black, whatever of black they could get hold of in the moment.

And in the little church of Rodillero the miraculous Christ waited, hanging upon the cross, with open arms. He also had been a poor shipwrecked one saved from the waters for the faith of fishermen. He knew like themselves the sadness and the solitude of the sea, and he stilled its waves.

They went upon their knees and their heads

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sank upon their breasts, while their mouths murmured petitions learned in childhood, never before uttered with such fervor. The candles that surrounded the sacred image flickered mournfully ; from the multitude arose a low murmur. The trembling rise and fall of the voice of the priest who officiated broke from time to time the majestic silence of the temple.

At the conclusion of the office Elisa and José met in the portico of the church, and gave each other a tender smile. With the innocent and pardonable egoism of love, they forgot in a flash all the sadness that had reigned over them, and in joyous and lively talk went together down the street of the village, deciding before they reached the house the day of their wedding.

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